Berklee Online

Voice

Digital Handbook

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Welcome!

Whether you're looking to jumpstart your career, realize your artistic aspirations, or connect with a musical community, we're excited for you to study with us! Check out the lessons and features in this handbook, and learn how Berklee Online can help you pursue your passion and build your musical future.

All the best,

Sean Hagon
Dean of Pre-College, Online, and Professional Programs

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With Berklee Online, you can study the renowned curriculum of Berklee College of Music from anywhere in the world, and in your own rhythm. Since 2002, more than 75,000 students from 144 countries have enhanced their creative output and marketability with Berklee Online's award-winning master's degree programs, bachelor's degree majors, certificate programs, and 250+ music courses. Through Berklee Online, you'll receive unparalleled instruction from music industry professionals and the same faculty members who teach at Berklee's Boston campus.

The Singing Voice: How to Use It without Abusing It

By Anne Peckham

From the Online Course
Vocal Technique 101

An excellent singer will have a combination of healthy technique along with emotion and artistry. If a singer has the heart or emotion but does not have healthy technique, then they could shorten a potential lifetime of voice use. Each person has their own limit for being able to use compensatory behaviors. For example, if you continually lift heavy objects using your back muscles instead of your legs, then your back will eventually give out. Likewise, if you sing with a manipulated vocal system then eventually there will be a technical breakdown because the vocal system will have reached its tolerance limit. Problems typically arise due to a body change such as pregnancy or from long-term improper vocal technique.

There is a wide range of ways we can use our voices professionally as singers. Those of us who are singers are also often teachers, choral directors, or worship leaders. There are also many full- and part-time professional singers in a wide range of genres holding down other jobs too. No matter what you do as a professional voice user, your voice requires peak performance for career longevity and maximum efficiency.

Singing problems may be due to long-term problems with coordinated vocal technique, or from overcompensating when sick,

causing excess tension. This excess tension or imbalance in vocal technique can put a lot of drag on the delicately balanced vocal mechanism, causing us to compensate by pushing. Signs of vocal problems include:

- vocal fatigue
- tightness in the throat
- change in voice quality
- pain or soreness in muscles of the throat and neck
- hoarseness/breathiness
- voice cuts out
- loss of high range
- stressed or pushed sound

Caring for your singing voice includes caring for your overall health, because your body is your instrument. Your voice quality and resilience reflect the state of your overall health. Remember that you must treat your speaking voice with care because good habits in speaking will influence your singing as well. Consider

the following practices for maintaining your singing voice, as they can help you immensely:

- Warm up before you sing in full voice.
- Keep your voice in shape with regular practice.
- Don't oversing during rehearsals. Learn to "mark."
- Be sure you can hear yourself by singing in a room with some natural echo or good acoustics, or by using adequate amplification when necessary.
- Stay well hydrated.
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- Check with your doctor if you have any questions or if you notice changes in your voice.

If your self-care includes plenty of water intake, rest, and you avoid abusing your voice in speaking and singing, the benefits will show up in your voice as vitality, clarity, and stamina. Obviously if you run yourself down, are under a lot of stress, don't eat nutritious foods,

and lack sleep, your voice will show that too. I encourage you to take a look at your health care and your voice-use to evaluate any parts that are not supportive to your vocal health. Changing up your self-care regimen may mean that you're also adjusting your social schedule. Sure, it's fun to stay up late and party with your friends, but make sure you're taking care of yourself and getting enough rest. If singing is important to you, then your sacrifices will be worth it, and you'll start seeing positive results right away!

Anne Peckham is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Read her feature interview on the following pages, or discover other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Want to explore this course even further? Learn More

Instructor Interview

Plotting the Future of Contemporary Voice

By Pat Healy

Anne Peckham has taught at Berklee College of Music for more than three decades, and has been Chair of the Voice department since 2011. She has sung with the Tanglewood Festival chorus and performed on recordings with the Boston Pops. She has authored

several popular books, including *Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer* and *The Contemporary Singer: Elements of Vocal Technique*, which have been translated into six languages. Anne is also Chair of the Bachelor of Arts in Voice Performance degree at Berklee Online. In this interview, she discusses the evolution of teaching voice, and what went into developing the major.

When did you first know that you wanted to sing?

I've known since elementary school. Music just was something that I loved, and we had a really good music program in school. I grew up in Indiana, and in my school you either played basketball or sang in the choir and played in the band. So it was music or basketball, and I wasn't good at basketball. So the music program at the school lifted me up. I played in the high school band and always sang in the choir and what we used to call the show choir or the swing choir. That was always something fun for me.

What was the moment where you fully committed and decided it was more than just a pastime?

When I planned for college, that's when I thought, "Okay, this is something I'm going to commit to and work on it." I wasn't sure where I belonged in the music field, or where I would fit,

and I wasn't aware of a school like Berklee where you could study contemporary music. I went to Butler University, which is in Indianapolis and studied classical music for years and enjoyed it and flourished there, partly because a group of friends and I sang in a contemporary music group outside of school. So I would do what my teacher wanted me to do in lessons, and then as a pastime, I would do what I thought of as the "fun" stuff, and that always kept me going all the way through graduate school. I was a vocal performance major, but as I got to graduate school, that's when I started thinking, "How am I going to make this life work for myself?" I felt like the traditional musical theater and opera pathway was not really for me. So I decided to delve into vocal pedagogy and teaching. In graduate school I had a graduate fellowship, and one of my responsibilities was to teach voice. That helped me along the path to my next steps.

Was Berklee the first next step, or were there other steps before that?

After I got my master's degree, I was hired at a small college in South Carolina to teach voice. I did that for several years, and also directed a church music program for quite a while. I directed everything from handbells to children's choir to adult choir, a job

where I learned a lot. Those two jobs put together made it possible for me to settle into a plan and realize that this was how I could make a living doing the things that I love, and move forward from there. I came to Berklee when my future husband [Rick Peckham]

> **I think forward-thinking, visionary voice teachers in some of these traditional organizations are helping everyone progress.**
>
> - Anne Peckham

was hired to work in the Ear Training department in 1986. As it turned out, there was a position open in the Voice department, and I was hired in 1987.

Tell me about the changes that you've seen over all these years in the type of material that students want to sing.
When we're talking specifically about style, I would say that Berklee has always been known as a jazz school and that was predominantly

the style of music that the Voice department was focused on. There was always a little bit of other styles, but there was not a clear structured program to study specific styles of music. I was hired to teach vocal technique because the college was building the voice program. At that time, they didn't have a large component of teachers to focus on how voice pedagogy applied to contemporary music styles. Vocal pedagogy for contemporary singing was in its infancy in the '80s.

The need for study and information about how science-based vocal pedagogy can be applied to contemporary vocal singing was very much needed at Berklee and everywhere in the voice community. That's where I got my start, and the need for this work led me forward into deeper study and eventually writing several books published by Berklee Press and Hal Leonard. It's pretty exciting to see all the growth in the Berklee Voice department and in the world of voice teaching.

That's interesting to think about. I edited Clare McLeod's terrific *Essentials of Teaching Contemporary Voice* course, and there was a really interesting part about how in 1983, half of the New York Singing Teachers Association

board resigned over "legitimizing non-classical styles," describing contemporary styles as "just noise."

That's exactly right. Because it was all about classical singing. If you were going to sing with "proper" technique, it had to be within the realm of classical music. How to sing contemporary music in a healthy manner was not widely understood at that time.

Do you think that there are still any holdouts, or do people generally just accept that contemporary music is a respectable form of musical expression?

The traditional vocal organizations—the organizations that involve and support voice teachers—have historically been slow to accept and welcome study in other styles of music. Now I see much more acceptance, especially welcoming vocal pedagogy as it relates to contemporary musical theater. I also see a much broader acceptance of contemporary music styles and what it means to use different qualities of sound that are not just classical. It's slowly changing, but I think forward-thinking, visionary voice teachers in some of these traditional organizations are helping everyone progress in our understanding. It has become acceptable and necessary to understand how science-based pedagogy must be integrated into contemporary vocal styles.

We've been speaking about time moving forward and the changes on a cultural level, but how about on an individual level? Is it possible to maintain your range throughout your whole life?

It takes a lot of dedication to maintain a professional level of singing as we age. The body changes. We evolve as humans. We aren't static. As we age a lot of the physical aspects of singing might affect one's voice. . . . I think it's important to be accepting of changes, but also to make sure that care and attention is paid to making sure that your support system is working, making sure that you're doing everything that you can to maintain a healthy instrument. That includes paying attention to our mental health.

I do think that there are some changes that are inevitable, but many people, as they grow older, can maintain really fine ranges and great tone quality. There's a lot to be said for the work that you have to continually put in. We must continually upgrade, improve, and pay attention. There are changes that we can accept and there are changes that require us to fight the good fight to keep working for improvement. Art involves changing and growth and a deep connection to mind, body, and spirit. The art of singing is not something you learn and you never have to think about again.

There is also a lot to be said for the life experience and wisdom that we bring to the table as mature artists. I would say that is as important, if not more so than technical ability.

Tell me how the major in Voice Performance came to be, and what went into developing the courses that make up the major.

Back at the genesis of online teaching I wasn't quite convinced that you could teach voice online. I really had to think about how that might work since voice teaching requires a very personal interaction of seeing, hearing, and engaging with the student vocalist. Now of course it's something that we embrace, especially after the pandemic, and teaching online is something that we've not only gotten used to, but we have learned to excel at it. But when we're talking about the online Voice Performance BA, I just knew that once we got past the doubts of the effectiveness of teaching voice online, the online BA in Voice Performance was happening at the right time and for all the right reasons. I'm thrilled to say that this came to fruition through the collaboration and work of our talented and amazing faculty. I'm so proud of the work we have done and what this degree offers to vocalists around the world.

Preventing Burnout When Recording Vocals

By Prince Charles Alexander and Mitch Benoff

From the Online Course
Vocal Production

For more than 40 years, vocal recording has relied on four primary techniques for capturing and creating a final vocal track:

1. Full Takes
2. Punching In and Out
3. Editing
4. Comping

These methods apply today as they did then. All are intended to help create the most compelling, cohesive, and consistent final vocal performance possible. These four approaches may seem obvious, but many artists, engineers, and producers are not totally clear about the reasons to employ each, or even how to do them well. So let's look at each one to better understand their benefits, and also the problems that can arise if they are used improperly.

Full Takes

Many vocalists like to record full takes (as in, "take that again . . . from the top")—singing the whole song from start to finish—when they record a track. This approach helps them stay in the emotional flow and dynamic shape of the song. Even if a singer

is doing a number of passes (attempts) at the song, they often still prefer doing full takes. Many singers have recorded a final vocal performance in the first pass, but those are usually pretty accomplished singers. Some of these first takes were scratch vocals (meaning not intended to be the final vocal used), which is why you should always be recording, even when just getting levels, etc.

The worst thing you can do is not be recording when the magic happens. It can break the spirit of a singer and kill a session, or even a working relationship. So keep this in mind—it may keep the magic in the project, and the clients coming through the door! When Butch Vig was producing Nirvana's album *Nevermind*, Kurt Cobain wanted to record "Something in the Way," with the full band. Vig didn't think it sounded right when he heard them playing it together in the main studio. So after Cobain came into the control room and sat on the couch with a guitar to demonstrate how he thought it should sound, Vig decided to just set up the mics right there. They got it in one take.

Unfortunately, for most vocalists, especially those with less recording experience, full takes can become problematic. We certainly want to do a few full takes, to help capture the emotional

shape of the performance and let the singer live through how it will grow and flow. But there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Doing full takes can quickly tire out some singers.
- Singers often keep repeating the same performance elements, with the same strong sections, lines, or phrases, but also with the same weak ones.
- Even if we try to make note of those weaker spots, it's hard for the singer to improve all of them in a full take. This becomes very frustrating for the singer, weakens their confidence, and leads to over-thinking rather than singing with natural emotion.

A skilled producer or engineer has a number of approaches to make sure this doesn't occur. Let's look at them.

Punching In and Out

This can really speed up the recording process, help maintain momentum, and keep the singer from tiring out. We just stop the

take, roll back to the problem spot, have the singer fix it, and carry on from there. Really good singers love punching in. They know what they wish they had done, they can do it right then and there, and they can punch in again if they still aren't happy with the performance.

Editing

The technique of editing, or the splicing together of different takes, preceded punching in. It was used back when recordings were done in just mono or stereo, and it was even done on wire recordings, which preceded tape! Many jazz or classical recordings that you love have edits of the full recording—containing all the instruments, vocals, and other elements—spliced together from different takes.

Comping

In its simplest form, comping is taking the best delivery—emotionally as much as technically—from a few keeper takes of the recorded lead vocal, and compiling them together onto one single track of the recording, known as the comp track. When done right, comping creates a best final vocal that is cohesive and consistent

emotionally and technically; better than any of the individual vocal tracks from which it was combined.

So now that you know how the primary techniques of vocal recording developed, you'll soon be able to better employ them in any technological format. You'll frequently use all of these essential production tools as you move forward in vocal production. You just need to keep in mind when each one is called for, and that often comes down to a skill that every producer needs to have: reading the room. You'll learn a lot more about that in our full course!

Prince Charles Alexander and **Mitch Benoff** are the authors of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Check out Charles's bio on the following pages, or discover other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Want to explore this course even further? Learn More

Instructor Spotlight:

Prince Charles Alexander

Prince Charles Alexander is a professor at Berklee College of Music. As a producer and engineer, his clients include the Notorious B.I.G., Sting, Aretha Franklin, and more. He has earned numerous Platinum and Gold certifications from the RIAA and has multiple Grammys.

At Berklee Online, he is the author of many courses, including the graduate course *Commercial Vocal Production*.

What advice would you offer to a singer who hasn't recorded in a professional studio before?

Record some voice memos of yourself singing against an instrumental track of a favorite song. You will be mimicking the actual process of recording in a studio. It is the same thing with much better equipment.

Do you have a favorite vocal effect to use in the studio?

My favorite vocal effect is reverb. It's like salt and pepper: not enough and there is no flavor. Too much and the meal is ruined, but when seasoned properly, the meal (song) is exquisite.

Who is a singer whose vocal qualities you most admire?

Marvin Gaye is my all-time favorite because he had multiple vocal textures and timbres; and, as a vocal producer, more or less invented a multi-track vocal style that most record producers draw from to this day.

What is your top vocal health tip?

One must have, and use all the time, a prescribed warm-up routine before one sings. Period. There are no pushbacks on that.

10 Iconic Singers' Approach to the Art of Improvisation

By Gabrielle Goodman

From the Online Course
Improvisation Techniques for Singing Pop and R&B

Improvisation exists to enhance and support the song. You must know the song—the melody, lyrics, and rhythmic phrasing. Performance of a song with or without improvisation is dependent on your knowledge of the piece, your technique, and the style. The more you know the song, the easier it will be to perform it. In most cases, the song can exist without improvisation. These two entities work together but can also exist separately.

I was teaching a student who thought that she didn't know a jazz standard we had been working on for her gig. She almost canceled her gig because she couldn't remember the solo. She thought she didn't know the song because she didn't remember Ella Fitzgerald's scat solo. I had to remind her that the solo was added to the song and that she could indeed sing the song without the solo. She did the song without the solo on the gig and as she became more comfortable with the solo we later added that.

Pop and R&B may sometimes have improvisational lines embedded in the original recordings. When considering a song, we must decipher what the written melody is and where improv lines occur and then try to learn as many of the improv lines as possible, or to figure out where to improvise on our own!

Studying the greats is important when developing your own style, because not only will you see what makes their voices so unique, but you'll also need to learn how to set yourself apart from them in your own unique way. Follow along with the listening examples provided in a Spotify playlist on the ***berkleeonline*** account called **"R&B Improvisation."**

Ray Charles

Ray Charles Robinson won a total of 17 Grammy awards as singer, pianist, writer, and arranger whose musical styles spanned R&B, pop, jazz, gospel, and country. His career spanned more than 60 years with chart-topping hits that remain a staple in many genres to this day. He is widely known as one of the architects of R&B music. Born on September 23, 1930, Charles' hits helped usher in a new kind of R&B music in the 1950s. He is the link between the jump blues of the 1940s and the soul music that followed. It must be stated that the earliest form of R&B, then known as the jump blues, generated hits by Louis Jordan and others, which were almost all based on blues changes, such as "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" (1947) known as the first R&B hit, "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens" in 1947, and "Let the Good Times Roll," which was later sung by Ray Charles.

Early hits by Charles include 1954's "I Got a Woman," 1958's "Night Time is the Right Time," 1959's "What'd I Say," 1961's "Unchain My Heart," and "Hit the Road Jack." This group of songs earned Ray Charles Grammy awards and gold records, propelling his music to the Billboard top 100s list. They also demonstrate many of the improvisational tools we examine in this course. These songs are by no means the full scope of his award-winning hits. Charles was among the Black artists who began to combine gospel and the jump blues in the 1950s, which resulted in songs that contained blues changes, blue notes, gritty textures, shouts, and many improvisational tools that were previously used in gospel and the blues. This created an emotionally charged, soulful sound that connected with listeners whether the songs were fast or slow. These tools coupled with new funky beats helped to create the R&B subgenre that we now know as soul music. Charles' music set the stage for James Brown, Aretha Franklin, the Jacksons, and many other R&B artists. It also paved the way for modern pop music, which currently includes many of the improvisational tools borrowed from soul music.

On a personal note, I had the pleasure of meeting and opening for Ray Charles on a number of occasions when I was singing

background for Roberta Flack in the early 1990s. I can say that his shows were nothing short of spectacular. The level of improvisation and energy in his singing and playing kept everyone on the edge of their seats. His vocal style, peppered with blues riffs, growls, and shouts kept the performances fresh night after night. He was also a master at flipping into his falsetto at the pinnacle of a song, creating an emotional stir.

Sam Cooke

In the full 12-week version of this course we spend some time discussing how pop and R&B sounds were different in the 1950s and '60s. Like all music from this time period, the evolution was swift and wildly different from its starting point. Sam Cooke is an artist whose career spanned both the pop and R&B genres in the 1950s and created a sound that is still emulated. He started off as a gospel artist and brought many of the techniques from that genre into his work as a pop and R&B artist. The singer, songwriter, and producer is perhaps best known for the classic R&B anthem, "A Change Is Gonna Come," but he also had several chart-topping singles, including "You Send Me," "Another Saturday Night," and "Twistin' the Night Away."

Sam Cooke utilized legato phrasing with a delivery that was generally smooth and connected. We hear his distinctive use of legato in "You Send Me."

Cooke was known for his use of combined smooth and gritty textures. You'll hear the use of legato combined with smooth and gritty textures. In legato phrasing vowel sounds are elongated. This creates a smooth sound. This is why we use the term "legato line." Believe it or not, you can have smooth or legato phrasing while still employing gritty textures. That was the beauty of Sam Cooke's style.

When we consider legato in this case, the line is smooth and everything is connected. It must be stated that a legato line in pop and R&B is different from the legato line used in classical music, where vowels are blended, modified, and often extended longer, sometimes to create a long line. The phrases in classical music are often longer as well. In pop and R&B music, the phrases are shorter, like phrases used when speaking.

Conversational phrasing is much like the length of the phrases we use when we speak, as opposed to the longer phrases that are often used in "traditional" music (i.e., opera and art songs) and some

musical theater pieces. In conversational phrasing, the phrases are shorter and more breaths are taken. You can hear this in his song "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons." In one line he sings "I love you for sentimental reasons" all in one phrase, with no breath. In another line, Cooke uses a more conversational phrasing with "I love you, (breath) for sentimental reasons."

Aretha Franklin

We can't discuss vocal improvisation without mentioning the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin. A masterful belter and improviser, Aretha has inspired and influenced everyone from Chaka Khan to Kelly Clarkson and beyond. There is much to discuss when we think of the many techniques Franklin employed. Since it's likely what she was best known for, let's use this space to examine Franklin's use of belting. "Respect" is the perfect song to demonstrate belting. In this track, Aretha belts everything, from the opening line to the last note of the song with power, clarity, and soul.

Belting is loud singing. Let's explore volume levels and what it takes to build up breath pressure for loud belting. As Aretha Franklin was a masterful belter, we will explore her use of belting and how it

can be used to bring sheer excitement to a song. Some singers find it easy to sing loudly. Some may sing too loudly and may need to temper the volume and dial it back a bit, while others may need to work harder to project the voice.

Aretha Franklin was unafraid to be bold and sing her story loudly. Imagine, if you will, Aretha Franklin singing "Respect" softly. Something would be lost in the interpretation. Certainly, Aretha could sing softly when needed, but listeners always knew that those big belting notes were coming, and audiences were energized and inspired when Aretha socked it to them. Belting was a staple in her style that was embedded in her delivery from her experiences singing gospel and the blues, both of which involve belting and shouts.

Aretha's version of "Respect" (Otis Redding, who wrote the song, recorded the original) is so impactful because of the power of her voice. Her performance of this iconic song (as well as her drastic reimagining of the original) is a benchmark for performance in R&B and standard-setter for soulful pop as well. It was said that Janis Joplin patterned her singing after Aretha Franklin, and Joplin influenced an entire generation of pop and rock singers. This is

where the genres meet. It's also important to note that Jennifer Hudson and Kelly Clarkson, who are strong belters in their own right, also garnered success with recordings and performances of Aretha Franklin's hit songs. Hudson even played Aretha to great effect in the 2021 film, *Respect*. It's clear that many incredible singers studied Franklin.

Tina Turner

Tina Turner, an iconic artist who has sold more than 100 million records worldwide, garnered 12 Grammys, and is ranked among the 100 best singers of all time, has influenced generations of artists.

Turner uses her chest voice, gritty textures, blue notes, and slurs to create an emotional and soulful delivery. Listen to her 1963 performance of "A Fool in Love," which displays many of these tools from the tool kit we discuss throughout this course and sets the stage for her hits that would emerge later from the 1960s to the 2000s, including 1966's "River Deep – Mountain High," 1970's "Proud Mary," 1984's "What's Love Got to Do with It," and 1989's "The Best." In addition to gritty textures, blue notes, and slurs, she also uses syncopated phrasing throughout the song.

Of the songs listed, “Proud Mary” perfectly illustrates Turner’s ability to go from a sizzling slow groove to an uptempo feel, adding the right improvisational lines that continue to infuse the song with energy from beginning to end.

Roberta Flack

Multi-Grammy award-winning Roberta Flack is an artist who inspired the world with her first hit “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” in 1972, followed by the hit “Killing Me Softly” in 1973. A string of hits followed throughout the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s. She especially excels in duets, as evidenced by her work with Donny Hathaway and Peabo Bryson. She is an artist who is known for her purity of tone, expressive conversational phrasing, and soulful sound.

Flack is revered by generations and her artistry has garnered praise and accolades from artists such as Lauryn Hill and Alicia Keys. On a personal note, as someone who worked with her for many years, providing backing vocals, I can say that her command of the voice is stellar. She has a keen awareness of phrasing and uses the breath as an emotional expression as well as a necessary means of support to keep her instrument vibrant throughout each song she sings.

Chaka Khan

There is much to be studied when we consider the vocal presence of Chaka Khan. One of the devices that she is famous for is octave displacement. Her wide range allows her to sing the melody in the lower register on the first verse of a song and then belt the melody up an octave later in the song. She offers a perfect example of this on 1977's "Everlasting Love." This is also a tool that is widely used by Aretha Franklin. Another device used by Chaka is the rhythmic pattern of an eighth note followed by a dotted sixteenth note. This creates a staccato, sassy feel in her phrasing.

Along with the attributes mentioned above, Chaka is known for her powerful belting and soulful phrasing. In addition to that, she often produces a wide/lateral timber (vocal texture) that creates a decidedly edgy sound. There is a lot of twang in this texture that can be achieved by using a horizontal mouth position as if smiling widely.

Listen to the following Chaka Khan songs and see if you can hear some of her vocal devices: 1978's "I'm Every Woman," 1984's "I Feel for You," and 1992's "You Can Make the Story Right."

There is much to observe when we consider the improvisational stylings of Chaka Khan, from belting to her use of pentatonic riffs, to her vocal textures ranging from a smooth, velvety tone to twangy textures.

Elton John

Pop icon, singer, songwriter, and pianist Elton John utilizes conversational phrasing along with slurs, twangy textures, syncopated rhythms, falsetto, blue notes, and many tools from our tool kit to spice up his songs.

His self-titled second album in 1970 produced the breakthrough single, "Your Song," which introduced him to a wider audience and featured many of the signature traits that he would continue to use throughout his multi-decade career. He honed his craft and reached superstar status with *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* in 1973, and that album's "Bennie and the Jets" is another early recording to feature a vocal style that felt completely original at the time. Check out his conversational phrasing in both of the aforementioned songs and on 1972's "Honky Cat," and listen to his syncopation on 1973's "Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting)."

Patti LaBelle

Known for her powerful belting over several decades, Patti LaBelle was the lead singer for the group Labelle (Patti LaBelle, Nona Hendryx, Sarah Dash) in the 1970s, which introduced "Lady Marmalade" in 1974. LaBelle is a premier belter and improviser who has influenced generations of singers (including me). I had the pleasure of doing a short tour providing backing vocals for Patti LaBelle in the early 2000s and I was amazed at her ability to sing song after song without any sign of fatigue.

I believe that her twang technique has played a huge role in allowing her to sustain her voice while belting throughout the years. You can hear the twangy texture in her upper and lower registers in every song. In addition to that, LaBelle is adept at flipping into her head register, producing operatic-type head tones at a moment's notice and quickly flipping back to chest voice.

Freddie Mercury

Freddie Mercury was a pop rock artist who explored his range and musicality to the fullest extent. A member of the group Queen in

the 1970s and ’80s, Mercury’s vocal style is still among the most studied and imitated years after his untimely death. His high, clear tenor voice can be heard on the iconic Queen recordings including “Bohemian Rhapsody” and “We Are the Champions,” which test the limits of his range.

Mercury employed belting, mixed voice, forward placement, twang, and also used gritty textures from time to time in his vocal delivery.

Mariah Carey

Mariah Carey carried Minnie Riperton’s use of the whistle tones forward into the 1990s and 2000s. In the 1990s, singers began to use highly ornate riffs borrowed from gospel artists. Carey began to integrate these kinds of riffs with whistle tones and this became a part of her signature sound.

Mariah Carey set a new precedent by singing whistle tones with riffs. Her whistle tones are often commingled with riffs based on minor pentatonic lines. Like Minnie Riperton, Mariah Carey is known to go from a very low note to a whistle tone within a short phrase, sometimes leaping two octaves within a phrase or on one word.

The difference between the two singers is that Carey's style of singing is influenced heavily by gospel and therefore contains faster riffs. Her chest voice is also heavier than Riperton's. Both have had a tremendous impact on singers who have access to whistle tones and strive to use them.

Tones in the whistle register are created by using the anterior part of the vocal folds, allowing only the backs of the folds to meet. When striving to access these tones, one cannot simply determine that they will make the anterior portion of the vocal folds meet and produce the notes. It happens as a result of keeping the sound as light as possible while employing forward placement and determining the actual note. You also have to have the note within your range. If it's not a part of your range, it won't happen.

As we've stated already, studying these iconic singers is important, but it's more important to take what you learn from them and put your own stamp on it. Take a look at somebody like Ariana Grande, who can not only impersonate most of the singers on this list to comedic effect (look up the videos), and hold her own doing a whistle-register riff-off with Mariah Carey (again, look up the video!), but she has also forged her own voice.

Finding your own voice will come when you devote all of the time and practice that is required to do so. This means studying the greats in all of the preceding pages, but it also means a lot of experimentation and discovery, and perhaps most importantly, taking the time to get to know yourself as a singer and as an artist, and taking the time and energy to think about what it is that you want to convey in your singing career. There is only one you, and you just have to learn how to use your voice to express that individuality. Good luck!

Gabrielle Goodman is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Read about her favorite vocal decoration on the following pages, or discover other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Want to explore this course even further? Learn More

Instructor Spotlight:

Gabrielle Goodman

Gabrielle Goodman is a professor in the Voice department at Berklee College of Music. Well-versed in jazz, R&B, classical, and gospel, Gabrielle has performed with Chaka Khan, Al Jarreau, Nancy Wilson, and Roberta Flack, who calls Goodman "one of the finest singers around today."

At Berklee Online, Gabrielle authored and instructs *Improvisation Techniques for Singing Pop and R&B* and *R&B Vocals*, the latter of which she wrote with the late Jeff Ramsey.

What is your vocal range?

My vocal range is three octaves.

Any specific intervals that you feel best about singing?

I absolutely love singing octaves flipping from my chest voice/head voice and singing octaves in general in pure head voice in the upper register or pure chest voice.

Who is a singer whose vocal qualities you most admire?

I adore Chaka Khan's powerful sound and her soulful approach and I feel blessed to have worked with her as a singer and writer.

Is there a song that made you want to become a singer?

Minnie Riperton's "Loving You".

What is your favorite vocal decoration to use?

My favorite embellishment is the mordent. Stevie Wonder and Brian McKnight use it and you also hear it in Eastern and classical music.

What's your advice for overcoming performance anxiety?

Thoroughly know your music and meditate even if for a short period to eliminate anxiety. You may choose meditation, prayer, or both.

Instructor Interview

Jeannie Gagné on Really Belting it Out

By Jonathan Feist

Jeannie Gagné has trained thousands of vocalists to sing with healthy technique and deep expression. She is the author of the online course *Popular Singing Styles: Developing Your Sound* and of the Berklee Press book *Belting: A Guide to Healthy, Powerful Singing*.

She has sung with Philip Glass and Cher, toured with reggae legend Frankie Paul, and opened for Barenaked Ladies. In this Q&A, she discusses belting as a singing technique and reveals how this expressive style can be done without causing injury.

Are there any famous singers who you want to shake by their lapels and train how to change their technique so that they don't hurt themselves?

There are many! The first one that comes to mind is Christina Aguilera. She is extremely gifted, but sings with a very tight jaw and constricted throat. I would work with her to release her jaw, though at this stage in the game, changing this habit would be a lengthy process that she would have to embrace.

Alicia Keys' singing is full of passion and feeling, and she uses a raspy sound. These qualities are extremely popular. However, in her case, this is at a cost. Her voice has become more hoarse, and she is pushing even harder to get sound. I would welcome working with such a gifted singer to help her release the tension, lower her chin, and breathe deeply.

Bruce Springsteen has come a long way from scream-singing, but you can see from the veins bulging in his neck that he still pushes his singing with every ounce of his energy. I would guess he has had some coaching and has shifted his singing approach to be easier on his body.

What mistakes do you commonly see vocalists make when trying to belt?

Pushing up "chest voice" way too far, constricting the throat, straining the voice, singing in the wrong key, pushing for too much volume, taking in huge gasps of air, visualizing the top notes as high that must be reached for. They're not high! They are faster, shorter frequencies, and the voice is more taut.

Can everyone belt? If not, how do you know if your voice would be well suited to belting?

Everyone can make a belted sound, though the volume and quality will differ widely depending on a person's vocal anatomy, experience, and even personality. Those who are naturally loud speakers take to belting more easily than those who are soft spoken.

How do you know if you are causing injury to your voice?

If after you have sung your voice is very tired, or hoarse, or your throat is sore, you have been potentially hurting your voice. If speaking is at all impaired after you sing, that is straining that could lead to injury. Another measurement is how long you can sing without issue. It should be at least one to two hours.

What would you say is the most important and productive vocal exercise?

Soft, clean tones. It may seem contradictory, but warming up and vocalizing on a sustained, clean and soft sound—not a breathy one—is the best way to prepare for belting. This method brings the vocal folds together in a healthy vibration pattern without abrasion, which provides the perfect environment for a stronger use of the voice. For any singing though, I recommend warming up for at least 20 minutes before you perform.

What is your vocal range?

My vocal range, when I'm fully warmed up, is a little over four octaves from C3 to E6. I am a soprano with a full lower chest voice and blend throughout the range.

Who are a few singers whose vocal qualities you most admire?

Some at the top of my list are Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Joni Mitchell, Chaka Khan, Kenny Rankin, Linda Ronstadt, Bonnie Raitt, Beverly Sills, Pavarotti, Ray Charles, and Mel Tormé.

What is your favorite vocal decoration to use?

The vocal decoration that comes out of me most naturally I learned by listening over and over again to Ella Fitzgerald: it's a small flip or trill during a phrase.

Do you have any tips for overcoming performance anxiety?

Taking in low, full, and slow breaths calms down the nervous system. Do this every day such as in a meditation practice, to learn how to quiet the mind.

Find more advice from Jeannie Gagné in her books—*Belting: A Guide to Healthy, Powerful Singing* and *Your Singing Voice: Contemporary Techniques, Expression, and Spirit*. Both selections were published by Berklee Press and are available wherever you find music books.

World-Class Courses

With Berklee Online, you have more than 250 courses to choose from, including more than a dozen voice performance courses. Here's a look at some selected offerings:

- **Voice Technique 101**
- **Music Theory and Sight-Singing for Vocalists**
- **Vocal Styles from Around the World**
- **Jazz Singing**
- **Vocal Production**
- **Pop and Rock Vocals**

Tips of the Trade

10 Tips for Singing 10 Shows Per Week

By Erini Tornesaki

I began my Berklee Online experience as a student, while touring with Cirque Du Soleil. After taking courses, I aspired to become a Berklee Online instructor because I knew I had some valuable lessons to share. When I first began performing as a singer for

Cirque's *Kurios* production, what I worried about most was whether I would be able to cope with singing up to 10 shows per week. I was able to do it, and here is how I maintained my vocal health:

1. Warm Up and Warm Down

Before the show I warmed up my voice for 20–30 minutes. After the show, while I was removing my make-up or on the way home, I did a gentle warm down.

2. Sleep as Much as Possible

It's absolutely necessary for vocal recovery! I aimed to sleep eight and a half hours every night.

3. Find a Healthy Meal Plan

A healthy and nutritious diet is essential for a singer, and everyone needs to find what works for them. One thing I personally eliminated from my diet was dairy and sugar.

4. Drinks Lots of Water

I consumed about three liters (101.4 fluid ounces) of water daily. The way I measured it was by filling and consuming my 1 liter water bottle three times throughout the day.

5. Avoid Alcohol, Smoking, and Coffee

I didn't drink much alcohol or smoke at all. Occasionally, I enjoyed one drink after the last show of the week. Coffee was more difficult. I never had more than a cup per day, because it can dehydrate you.

6. Reduce Talking

I avoided talking too much during the day and I especially avoided talking loudly. I also avoided going to bars, clubs, or other loud places. Sometimes I would be on complete vocal rest on my day off.

7. Engage in Physical Exercise

I did body weight exercises and stretching. A singer's body needs to be strong but also flexible, so it is important to keep that balance.

8. Try Nasal Rinsing and Steaming

I used a Neti Pot daily for "nasal showers" to help with congestion and reduce allergies and I steamed my vocal cords with boiled water two to three times a week.

9. Pace Yourself

Our artistic director always reminded us to distribute our energy. I tried to distribute it amongst the 10 weekly shows, and this took

me a few months to figure out. Initially I felt drained by halfway through the week, so I learned to pull back a little.

10. Care for Your Mental Health

Working long days, repetition, tiredness, and being away from loved ones can affect your mental health. That's why it's important to check in with yourself and your feelings, take care of your mental health, and do other things you enjoy, besides work.

These 10 tips are simply recommendations from my own experience, not necessarily rules that are never made to be broken. Sometimes you'll be in a situation where you have to do promotional interviews to get people to come out to your shows. Other times you won't have time for physical exercise. Show yourself some compassion if you don't hit all 10 of these marks every day, and keep striving to do your best. You'll likely find yourself happier and healthier, onstage and off.

How to Provide Effective Feedback to Voice Students

By Clare McLeod

From the Online Course
Essentials of Teaching Contemporary Voice

Vocal Technique should be reliable and predictable. Being able to produce a sound consistently is the hallmark of a professional singer, and singers are expected to be able to produce performances of high quality on demand. Learning, in contrast, is not linear. Mistakes can help refine understanding and generating choices gives greater artistic freedom.

As you develop your practice as a voice teacher, consider ways you can help students understand the process of motor learning. Students may need help to see the connections between what they are doing, learning, and what they will be able to do. Don't judge their explorations too quickly. Instead, help them recognize the parts that are in play, because if they believe that each sound they make is a measurement of their talent, or ultimate worth, these misconceptions will be trickier to undo later on in their journey, and it may even make them want to stop the journey altogether. Students who expect consistently excellent performance quality when singing risk becoming inhibited. The teacher must help students to be intentional when they are exploring and experimenting with sounds, and when they are practicing to acquire the desired motor learning, as distinct processes from performing.

Motor Learning

Learning voice might be thought of as learning to make sound, coordinating several systems in the body: the breathing, vocal fold vibration, and the shape of the vocal tract, including the articulators that form each phoneme. If you add to this the influence of how we perceive sound, the way it radiates from us in different spaces, we involve perception and cognition. There are multiple layers of complexity, so perhaps we need to consider our intention to really understand the process of singing, and exactly what we are coordinating:

- Respiration
- Phonation
- Resonation
- Articulation
- Perception (Cognition)
- Radiation (Propagation)
- Intention
- Expression

With this list in mind, we can certainly say that learning voice is more than learning to coordinate muscles, just as we establish at the beginning of my course: teaching is more than telling.

Feedback is an essential component of our learning journeys. In addition to deciding what to draw a learners' attention to, teachers must also decide when and how to intervene.

The quality of listening will be a huge factor in the effectiveness of instruction, as it is an activity where information is gathered. Our listening forms part of our feedback system.

Humans vary in their sensitivity to sources of information—some have more developed abilities to detect differences in color, for example. My husband swears his sweater is brown, but I would call it olive, firmly in the green category. Context will influence us as well. The important point is that perceptual skills can be cultivated. Just as a wine taster develops their skills and knowledge of wine, our perceptions are not fixed. We can learn to differentiate more finely.

Why Is Feedback Important?

Feedback allows us to notice the consequences of our actions. Learning requires feedback, since it reveals the distance between the desired outcome and the actual outcome. Effective feedback facilitates analysis of what occurred, and may help to generate

explanations for further testing. In order to learn from mistakes, one must notice when and how they happened, and effective feedback helps make for better noticing and better adjustments. An effective feedback process generates learning that leads to a change in practice.

Without good quality feedback, which includes specifics that help to close any gaps, students can fall prey to magical thinking—that if they keep doing it, it will be correct with time, somehow fixing itself. As neural pathways are strengthened, an undesirable behavior is reinforced. We want to habituate good patterns, not have to undo, or relearn.

When learners believe that they do not need to change, they are less likely to want feedback; thus they resist constructing new knowledge that might differ from their existing knowledge.

Confirmation bias in humans—defined as the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories—leads them to pay attention to feedback that fits their view of themselves. You can also see it in students trying to arrange their environment to acquire further self-confirming evidence,

either in their practice habits, or their preferred repertoire. Feedback has a role in subverting this and can be seen to have its greatest effect when a learner expects a response to be correct and it turns out to be wrong. The dissatisfaction of unavoidable evidence can motivate students to learn how to correct the error. Consider the importance of suitable tasks and a learning environment in which making mistakes is safe.

Students have information from their past experiences, including their knowledge about the specifics of singing and music making. This information includes their metacognition, which is their awareness and understanding of their own thought processes, and it also includes their beliefs about themselves and the task.

External (Augmented) Feedback

Having concentrated thus far on the feedback that is focused on the perception of the learner, we will now consider feedback that is available to the learner from you, the teacher. Peers, caregivers, and friends fit into the augmented feedback category here also, but we will focus on what we can control: us. Consider the amount of

lesson time you and the students have, opposed to the amount of time a singer is unsupervised during activities where they use their voice, including their intentional practice and everyday voice use. Our attention to the use of feedback in a lesson can help create the conditions for students to learn more effectively on their own, and maximize the awareness they bring to voice use.

Consider the questions you ask your students as a type of feedback, too. When a question is clear, and formed in a way that the student is able to answer them, they will build confidence as well as generate answers. When a question is too broad or abstract, a student may experience anxiety, negatively impacting their ability to respond. Students can decipher whether questions are genuine requests for information from them or whether there is a "right answer" they are expected to give. Your curiosity about their experiences reinforces the value of their thoughts and feelings, helping to build trust between you and your student.

Teacher Feedback

Trust and **psychological safety** are crucial for learning from feedback. Students are more likely to trust you, and will be more willing to be vulnerable if you are kind, honest, open, and reliable.

Psychological safety is about feeling able to be yourself without fear of consequence. There is a level of interpersonal risk in asking questions, seeking feedback, making mistakes, or proposing new ideas. When a student feels psychologically safe, those risks seem lower, and they're more likely to engage in these activities. A student needs to want feedback in order to learn from it, and it is important that the feedback is seen as information and not as a judgment.

Types of Feedback

When giving verbal feedback to someone, there are a few key things to keep in mind for optimal results:

- **Be specific.** The more general or vague you are, the less clarity the learner has. If you focus on small steps, the learner is more likely to approach the task with a growth mindset.
- **Be succinct.** Keep the focus on what the student did. If you are brief, you have more time for the student to do more singing.
- **Be clear.** Use vocabulary that the student is easily able to understand (and should relate to the goals you have set together).

When a student seems like they're trying to please you, it may mean that they are not enjoying the process. It may create a learning environment where the singer is reliant on you, rather than building their own self efficacy—the students' belief in their own capacity to achieve at a specific task.

Perhaps it comes as no surprise, but research bears out the link between focusing feedback on accurate attempts, rather than failed or inadequate attempts at a task. Feedback that builds on changes from previous trials shows positive effects of learning also.

Body Language of Feedback

In addition to what we say, our own nonverbal communication is part of the feedback a student receives. Consider the messages students may perceive that are contained in the:

- Frequency of eye contact
- Proximity and movement towards or away from student
- Amount of variation in dynamic range

continued on next page

- Amount of variation in pitch range
- Emotional tone
- Gestures and freedom of movement
- Facial expressions

  Approval: grinning, laughing aloud, widening eyes, raising brow

  Disapproval: frowning, knitting brow, pursing lips, narrowing eyes

Cultural context plays a role in interpreting these nonverbal expressions. A quick speech rate may denote enthusiasm to some cultures, but not to others. So be sure to state your meaning clearly.

Amount of Feedback

You are likely to hear several elements in a person's singing that you are curious about, but you must make decisions about what to give feedback on. This is why it's so important for you and your student to come up with specific goals together and agree upon them.

Prioritize your feedback so that it addresses the goals and expectations that are relevant to the task and to the singer.

What is the most important thing for the student to get better at? Your answer to this question may be answered in reference to that particular lesson, or overall, and remember that early in the skill acquisition process, you can be specific without expecting the same amount of precision you would expect from a more skilled performer. For the more skilled singers, you can narrow the goals further, working with more complexity and give feedback accordingly.

While prioritizing your feedback is an important guide, remember that you will need to be agile too, ready for any unexpected events. Sometimes a "distraction" contains lessons or occasions for "just-in-time" help, indicating the need for assistance before the main goal can be met.

The amount of feedback you give also depends on the learner. Being aware of their particular state that day, and how much they are likely to process and retain is important. Also, when making decisions about your feedback, remember that controlling the length of the task will make an important difference. A shorter task creates a great opportunity for focused feedback.

When to Give Feedback

If we are giving directions while the singer is doing the task, or if we give feedback as soon as they cut off, we may inhibit their ability to process their own perceptions. This works against their own autonomy and can create an unhealthy dependence on a teacher.

Providing feedback during a task may enhance performance temporarily, and prevent error. Although physical guidance provided by an instructor—adjusting the body while singing—may increase confidence when engaging in this type of feedback, evidence shows that there is poor skill retention when that guidance is removed.

Consider waiting a moment or two for the singer to process their experience, and then reinforce what they are learning by asking what they noticed, before you give feedback. You may be quite specific here, depending on the task and their needs. For example, you might ask, “What did you notice about how your throat felt on the higher pitches? How clear was the vowel on the word ‘love’?”

Asking the more general question, “What did you notice?” has a time and place that will serve the particular needs of a student at

that moment. It can surface some interesting responses, revealing what the student is attending to, which may or may not be what is intended.

The decision to give feedback is dependent on what stage of learning a student is in. At the early stages, giving frequent feedback assists the student to form desired responses. The student needs to develop a reference for what a successful attempt is in order to develop their error detection skills. As skills develop, the amount of feedback should diminish as the student becomes more autonomous, which as a teacher, is one of your greatest rewards.

Clare McLeod is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Check out her bio on the following pages, or discover other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Want to explore this course even further? Learn More

Instructor Spotlight:

Clare McLeod

Clare McLeod is an associate professor in the Voice department at Berklee College of Music. She trained at the National Center for Voice and Speech, and is a member of the Voice Foundation, the National Association of Teachers of Singing and the Pan American Vocology Association.

At Berklee Online, Clare authored and instructs the *Essentials of Teaching Contemporary Voice* course.

What is your top vocal health tip?

Listen to your body.

Is there a song that made you want to become a singer?

My first response is to reject the premise: I never wasn't one, no song needed. While I recognize that there are people who will not be professional singers, if you can talk, you can sing, as far as I'm concerned. Both talking and singing are learned behaviors—it's not even a special quality of humans—it's a part of life. My second response: I don't remember the song where I heard my brother singing in a choir—the sound of voices together made me want to join in.

What is your favorite vocal decoration to use?

I don't have one. Silence is a pretty good way to highlight sound—one way of interpreting "less is more." It feels antithetical to a cultural tendency that assumes improvement is to be made through addition or that is impressed by quantity.

Karaoke: Love it or loathe it?

While I have no desire to do it, I have respect for the opportunity it gives people to sing.

Your Career Path

Ever wonder what kinds of careers exist for a singer? You may be surprised to learn that there's more to it than fronting a band. The opportunities are even broader:

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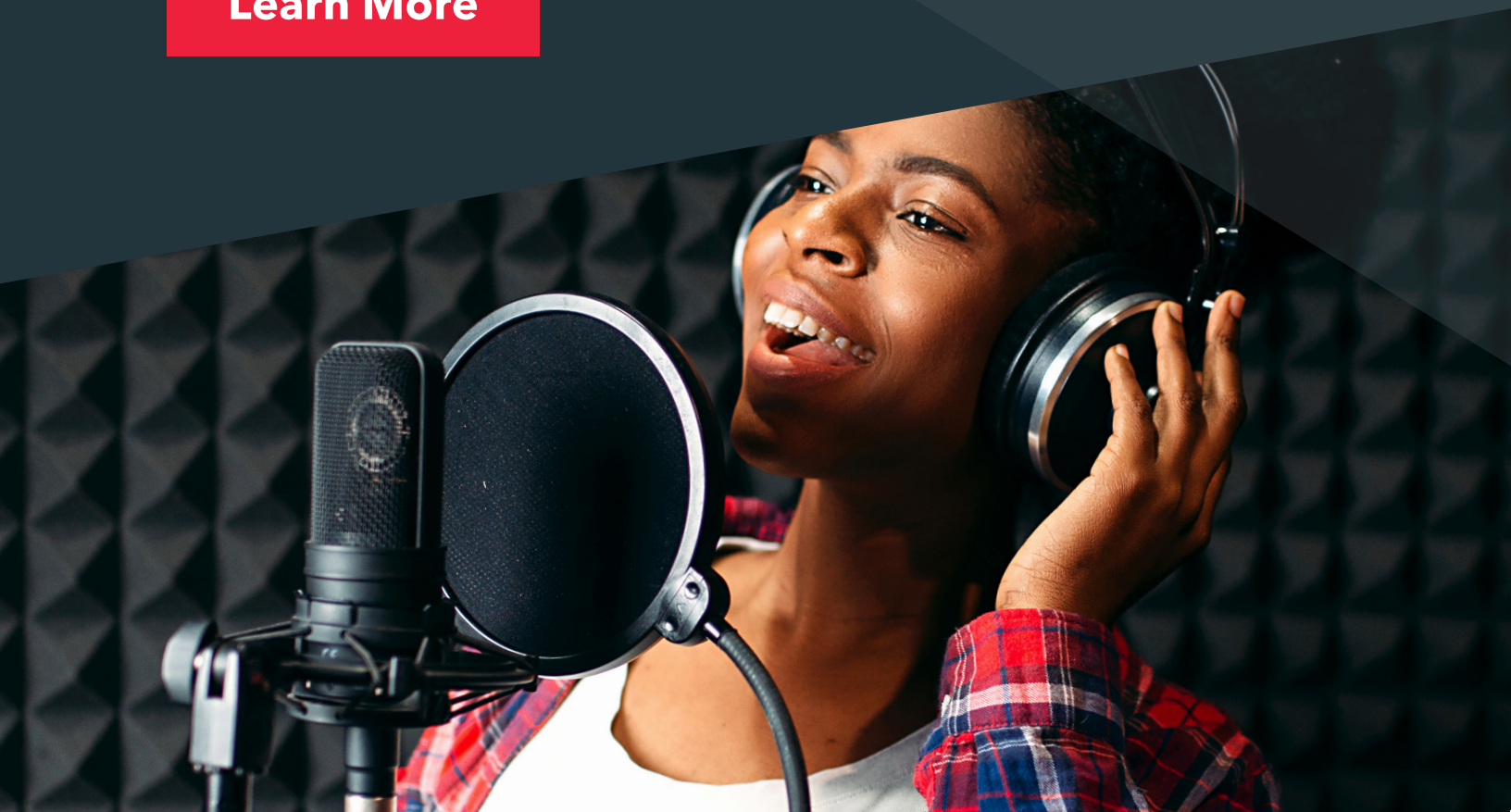

Instructor Spotlight:

Ashlee Varner

Ashlee Varner is a pianist, vocalist, educator, arranger, and composer from Pennsylvania. She has toured throughout the world with numerous groups as a pianist and vocalist, and is best known for her unique vocal arrangements. In 2014, she won *DownBeat* magazine's award for Best Graduate College Jazz Vocal Soloist.

At Berklee Online, Ashlee authored and instructs the *Music Career Essentials for the Professional Singer* course.

Do you have a favorite vocal effect to use in the studio?

Reverb ALL DAY, but I try to record dry and add it later.

What is a song passage with a real stand-out vocal moment in your opinion?

There are so many, but if I had to choose one, the control Brandi Carlile used on her Grammy performance of "The Joke" was amazing.

What is your top vocal health tip?

Be aware of how you use your voice and your body in everyday life and how it can impact your singing. Exercise your voice regularly, avoid yelling, stay hydrated, and eat a healthy diet.

Is there a song that made you want to become a singer?

"The Good Shepherd" by Yolanda Adams.

Karaoke: Love it or loathe it?

Love it! It's the most low-pressure situation where no one really expects you to be good, so it's a place where you can just try anything without much stress!

Singer/Songwriters & the Power of Inflection & Nuance

By Didi Stewart

From the Online Course
Pop and Rock Vocals

The best singer/songwriters, both classic and contemporary, are the troubadours of our time—composers of highly personal story-songs that are universal enough to touch on the human condition.

The first wave of American singer/songwriters came to prominence in the late 1960s, just as the utopian façade of the Summer of Love was beginning to crumble. Like much of society, these artists began turning inward, focusing more on personal relationships rather than on worldly issues. A style of songwriting emerged that was dubbed "confessional": lyric writing as self-revelation, with the performer taking listeners into their confidence as one might do with a trusted friend.

Two of the earliest of these singer/composers were the Canadian singers Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen. Both possessed something other than the standard pop voice: Mitchell's flitted daringly across a multi-octave range, while Cohen's seemed a near monotone. Though Mitchell and Cohen were later hailed as great interpreters, celebrated for their subtle vocal shadings and nuances, much of their early renown came from having more conventional singers cover their material.

Unique vocalists like Carole King and Laura Nyro also had more initial success writing for others, but audiences eventually came around to the idea that composers were the most authentic interpreters of their own work. This opened the door to even more unconventional voices; Randy Newman and Tom Waits would have been less likely to emerge as performers in a time not so perfectly suited to their talents. Bob Dylan had really made it all possible for these people, including Mitchell and Cohen. By 1970, a successful performing career had little to do with vocal perfection, and everything to do with interpretation.

Interpretation is a singer's personal take on the meaning or message of a song. The most common interpretive devices are nuance and inflection.

Nuance refers to a subtle difference or variation in vocal tone and texture, often to play against or underscore what the lyrics are saying. Some comedians are masters of nuance; Stephen Colbert tends to get laughs with his abrupt and unexpected shifts in tone.

Inflection has to do with the way a singer chooses to phrase or color a word, sometimes altering the tone to impart special meaning.

Clever uses of inflection can be found in Joni Mitchell's "All I Want." When she sings the line "I am on a lonely road and I am traveling, traveling, traveling," the increasing exasperation of her tone on the repetitions of the word "traveling" make the listener understand that she's getting somewhat weary of that road. An even more subtle inflection is the change in tone from "I hate you some" to "I love you some"—the voice suddenly goes soft and helpless on the word love, and the listener intuits Mitchell's see-sawing emotions even if they don't "get" it on a conscious level. Listen to the following songs, then use the discussion questions to analyze them:

- "Fire and Rain" by James Taylor
- "All I Want" by Joni Mitchell
- "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen
- "Save the Country" by Laura Nyro
- "Bad Liver and a Broken Heart" by Tom Waits

(Turn to the next page for the discussion questions.)

Discussion Questions:

1. What was it about the way each vocalist interpreted their lyrics that moved you, intrigued you, made you want to listen beyond the first 30 seconds and hear the rest of the story?

2. What examples of nuance and inflection did you notice? Did these devices deepen your appreciation of the song?

Reflect on your answers and then think about how you can apply nuance and inflection to your own songs and those that you cover.

Didi Stewart is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Check out her bio on the following pages, or discover other lessons in this course by clicking the link below

Want to explore this course even further? Learn More

Instructor Spotlight:

Didi Stewart

Didi Stewart is an associate professor of voice at Berklee College of Music. A two-time winner of the Boston Music Award for Best Female Vocalist, Stewart has been a longtime fixture on the Boston music scene. Also a composer for film and TV, Didi's songs have been featured on *Melrose Place*, *The Young and the Restless*, *Touched by an Angel*, and more.

At Berklee Online, Didi authored and instructs the *Pop and Rock Vocals* course.

What is your vocal range?

Approximately E3-A5.

Who is a singer whose vocal qualities you most admire?

Aretha Franklin. Vocal virtuosity plus naked honesty plus a profound understanding of the joy and pain of being human.

Is there a song that made you want to become a singer?

"The Night Before" by the Beatles. I remember seeing the movie *Help!* on a hot, sticky summer afternoon. When Paul McCartney threw back his head and sang, "cryyy . . ." wailing on that high A, it was like a bolt of lightning. I might as well have jumped up and screamed, "Now I know exactly what I want to do with my life!"

What is your top vocal health tip?

Hydration, hydration, and hydration. I have a friend who swears by gargling with Hennessy, but it seems like a waste of good cognac. Stick with water.

What is your favorite vocal decoration to use?

The problem with having a "favorite" is that you run the risk of overusing it. Great vocalists have lots of colors in their paint box.

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