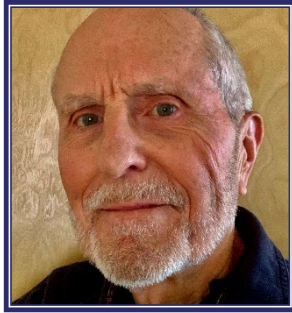


# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* TEACHERS *of* SINGING



**CLIFTON WARE**

*ENCORE! SOCIETY*

FOUNDING MEMBER

**“As I continued studying, learning, and experimenting with group-voice methods and techniques, I became a very enthusiastic practitioner and advocate.” – Clifton Ware, who has established the Clifton Ware Group-Voice Pedagogy Award with NATS**

My interest in singing was sparked at age 11, as a boy soprano in my church’s children’s choir. But my love of singing flamed when I signed up for 10th-grade choir. My good fortune was to be discovered and mentored by Alvin Jon “Pop” King, a semi-retired choral director, and also my main high-school choral director, Leland Byler.

Pop King took a strong interest in tutoring me, including after-school coaching sessions to learn my first solo song, “Mother Machree”, a popular Irish ditty by Chauncy Scott. When I made my solo debut performing this sentimental song for the all-female choir, the amount of positive feedback I received spurred a serious interest in singing.

I think it’s accurate to claim that my vocal career began on that occasion and continued growing throughout high school. I soon began taking voice lessons with Charles McCool, a transplanted singer-teacher from Chicago who managed a flourishing private studio. High-school vocal opportunities consisted of my singing first-tenor in the acapella choir, with a popular boy’s quartet (Commanders), and in my church’s youth and adult choirs. I also performed leading-tenor roles in the musicals *Brigadoon* and *Down in the Valley* and soloed for local organizations and numerous weddings.

College and university studies added breadth and depth in the advancement of all essential knowledge and skills required of solo vocal performers. All the while I directed

church choirs and performed as a soloist in the standard vocal-performance venues—choirs, musicals, operas, song recitals, oratorios, and so on. The list of mentors and teachers who contributed to my formal educational growth is too long to name all, but I remain very mindful of them and grateful for their support.

Teaching as a full-time career began with a year of service as a choir director at Murrah High School in Jackson, MS, and continued at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM, 1963-69). While there I taught voice, directed undergraduate choir, served as opera director, and sang major tenor roles professionally with opera companies and orchestras in Jackson, Mobile, and New Orleans. During that time, I benefited from collaborative associations with many professional musicians, directors, teachers, and one major mentor-teacher: David Foltz, USM choral director and chair of choral activities.

During my six years teaching at USM, I began studying part-time at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois for my doctorate in vocal performance, concluding with a final year of residency while on a sabbatical from USM. My two principal mentor-teachers at NU were voice-instructor Norman Gulbrandsen and opera-director Robert Gay.

The next 37 years (1970-2007) were spent serving on the voice faculty of the University of Minnesota (UMN) School of Music in Minneapolis, where I taught applied voice, class voice (also supervised teaching assistants), and voice pedagogy for the last 25 years. In 2002, at age 65, I negotiated a five-year retirement phaseout based on a quarter-time teaching load. During that time that I taught, supervised, and administered a Voice Pedagogy Certificate Program that included five course offerings and produced 25 graduate recipients. Group-voice instruction was also included throughout, notably in the form of a voice practicum that combined three graduate “teachers” with two undergraduate “students” each.

For the first decade at UMN I also performed extensively as a soloist in all classical vocal-music venues, performing major works with musical organizations, including the Minnesota Opera, St. Paul Opera, Minnesota Orchestra, and the former Plymouth Music Series (VocalEssence). Vocal mentor-teachers included Roy Schussler, who hired me, and graciously provided occasional vocal guidance until his death in 1982. I later worked for a decade in a similar fashion with Harris Balko, typically in small group sessions that involved a few of our graduate students, with everyone singing and receiving group feedback. This was yet another uniquely rewarding group-voice experience.

When Roy retired from teaching class voice and pedagogy, he turned both course assignments over to me. That opportunity became the catalyst directing me on the group-voice educational path. As I continued studying, learning, and experimenting with group-voice methods and techniques, I became a very enthusiastic practitioner and advocate. The group dynamics and systematic approach to teaching and learning the basic knowledge and skills of voice performance inspired me to write and self-publish *Voice Adventures*, the prototype for *Adventures in Singing* (AIS, 1e,1995), a voice-class text/song anthology published in four editions by McGraw-Hill. After completing the first edition of AIS, I wrote *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy* (1998), also published by McGraw-Hill. Of course, I could not have written these and subsequent publications without the contributions of numerous concurrent and long-deceased voice pedagogues. I remain extremely grateful for the many influential pedagogues from whom I gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the values embedded throughout the process of voice study and performance.

Because of the many positive educational benefits of group-voice, an expanded awareness of this special mode of learning and teaching within the voice-teaching profession would be a rewarding outcome. If the annual Group-Voice Pedagogy Award helps inspire more voice teachers to explore and promote the advantages of group voice, I would consider the award a very worthwhile incentive. Moreover, establishing an affinity group within NATS of group-voice practitioners could serve such a purpose, and perhaps award recipients could serve as leaders.

The systemic role of NATS in my professional life began in the mid 1960s and continues up to the present. Most of my voice mentor-teachers have been members of NATS, as have most of the voice colleagues with whom I've been associated. Throughout my teaching career, I've benefited from associations with NATS members nationally, regionally, and locally, most notably with Minnesota NATS, including service as president, and coordinator of several workshops and state auditions. National service included a stint on the NATS Foundation Board, hosting and coordinating the first NATS Intern Program at the U of MN in 1991, teaching in the 2004 Intern Program, and serving as panelist-presenter at NATS conferences and workshops. Suffice it to say that NATS has been extremely influential in my life, providing ample opportunities for learning, serving, and networking with colleagues.

Looking back over my long career, I remain grateful for the many positive values, knowledge, and skills gained as a singer, teacher, scholar, administrator, and colleague. Somehow, despite my not having a strong musical background prior to becoming a singer, I managed to improve my musicianship, gain familiarity with a variety of vocal and textual

literature, develop foreign language diction proficiencies, and communicate effectively using informed interpretation, dramatic expression, and a poised stage presence when performing vocal works, in all standard vocal performance venues.

However, above all, throughout a long, intense educational process. I learned a great deal about myself, particularly in discerning personal strengths and weaknesses, and striving to live a balanced life. Early on, I became convinced that maintaining a healthy mind-body would be my number-one priority. I also learned that I functioned best when extrovertive and introvertive personality characteristics were balanced. While performing and teaching allowed me to be more of an extrovert, I discerned that my introvertive character was better suited to scholarly interests. Of course, age has also played a role, with extrovertive energies having played a larger role during formative years, and introvertive tendencies dominating later years, particularly in old age.

In considering wise words of advice that might be helpful to younger generations, I offer the following:

- Always take good care of your mind and body, by adopting life-long healthy habits that involve regular exercise, a moderate diet, sufficient rest and recreation.
- Seek to know and understand yourself as thoroughly as possible.
- Think critically and remain open-minded, all the while remaining firmly grounded in reality.
- Learn to view life through a big-picture, long-term lens, constantly broadening the scope and scale, depth and breadth, when exploring any significant topic or issue.
- Be aspirational, but realistic in terms of expectations.
- Maintain a record (log) of your thoughts and life experiences for future reference.
- Travel as lightly as possible through life, material wise; live simply as possible.
- Develop and maintain friendly collegial relationships with everyone you meet and know; avoid personal conflicts that result in burning bridges.
- Be a decent, caring human being; act like a responsible citizen, locally, nationally, and globally.
- Believe in something larger than yourself, a greater presence that encompasses everything that exists in Nature—physically and spiritually.

Finally, seek to understand the full dimensions of three principal domains: Truth (reality); Goodness (morality), and Beauty (quality). Also, remember that it helps to adopt a life-affirming attitude founded on sincere gratitude for everything that exists. After all, everything is connected, and all beings are the products of stardust.

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## **GIVING to NATS**

To contribute to the Clifton Ware Group-Voice Pedagogy Award Fund click [this link](#). You also may contact the NATS Executive Office at (904) 992-9101 for assistance.

