

Pockets: In Praise of Curious Generalists

By Cynthia Vaughn, Associate Editor for Independent Voices

Recently a colleague lamented that they were experiencing imposter syndrome because “everyone is an expert and I’m just a voice teacher.” In this age of information, many voice teachers are finding their own areas of interest and study. They have become niche specialists in topics such as mindfulness,



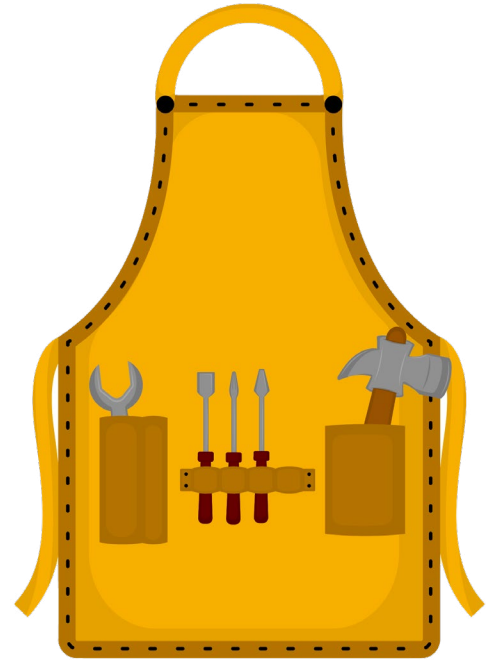
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acoustics, voice science, anatomy, SOVTs, tongue-tension release, contemporary microphone styles, mix/belt, rock, scream, diction, repertoire of a specific country, etc. Others focus on business, social media, and marketing for voice teachers. Others have earned certificates and spent years studying or creating a specific vocal method or school of training. Colleagues who have written journal articles and books and created blogs and YouTube

channels based on their specialty area frequently present workshops, masterclasses and seminars. It is an exciting time to be a voice professional!

It also can be daunting to feel like you have somehow missed the boat by being good at a lot of things, instead of honing in on one particular skill or area of pedagogy. I don’t consider myself an “expert,” but rather a curious generalist. I picked up the term “Generalist” from my son, who is a video game designer, and “sole dev” who studied game art and design in college but has learned many other related roles and skills on his own to become a “Generalist.” In the gaming world “Generalists are UX (User Experience) designers with a broad number of responsibilities, while Specialists have more depth of knowledge in one kind of design.” (Genís Frigola, “[Generalists vs Specialists](#),” Medium.)

Long after earning my university degrees, I have continued to explore voice-related subjects and practical studio applications. I have a passion for continuing education and for anything that can help my students and me be better singers, performers, teachers, and humans. When I was a young artist in my late 20s and early 30s in New York, I sought a specialist. Doris Yarick Cross was well-known as a teacher of professional level coloratura sopranos. My own voice students, however, required me to be a generalist. I have taught teens, college students, adult avocational choir and community theater singers, senior adults, professional performers, choir directors, and voice teachers.



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I like to imagine a carpenter’s apron with many, many pockets and tools. Everything I have learned about singing and teaching singing that I think will be helpful goes into a pocket — for now or later. Occasionally, I clean out the pockets, much like cleaning out lint and old tissues from a real pocket. Ideas that are outdated are replaced by current knowledge or sensibilities. If we are to truly teach the student in front of us, we need to approach each singer as a unique person with their own skills, challenges, dreams, and baggage. Though we as teachers may have a basic core approach to our teaching, different students need different things. A curious generalist learns, plays, tries new things, and is never afraid to say, “I don’t know. Let me think about that...” or “I don’t know, but I know someone who is a specialist in that area, and I’ll ask them!”

If you enjoy teaching students of various ages, skill levels, styles, and interests, embrace being a curious generalist. National

Association of Teachers of Singing offers countless ways to fill your teaching pockets with resources and knowledge through NATS conferences, workshops, and international pedagogy tours, by reading NATS publications, and by accessing the NATS Live Learning Center and NATS IDEA Toolkit.

For the “Independent Voices” articles in this issue of *Inter Nos*, Marisa Gray Atha tells how she, as a busy independent studio owner and parent, makes time for her own learning and discovery. Toni Crowder and co-author Denise Ritter Bernardini share ideas for creating a mindful independent studio and Kim Woycke tells of coming up with a way to flip pre-show week lessons for students’ wellness. Jessica Saunders tells how she collaborated with composer Lisa Nehers to create new “tailor made” songs that her students debuted. Finally, Garry Froese writes about the importance of music, singing and community for older adults as he spotlights dementia friendly choirs.

If you have ideas to share with independent studio teachers, contact me on Facebook Messenger or by email at CynthiaVaughn@icloud.com Fill those pockets with learning and community!

Cynthia Vaughn, associate editor for *Independent Voices*, has been a proud NATS member since 1983. She has been active in leadership at the chapter and region levels, and she was an invited master teacher for the 2020 NATS Intern Program (postponed to 2021 due to COVID). Before moving to Norfolk Virginia in 2022, Vaughn retired from Magnolia Music Studio, the multi-teacher studio she founded and directed in Colorado and Washington from 2008 to 2022. Previously, she was on the voice faculty of Colorado State University, and Art Connects International. Vaughn and the late Meribeth Dayme, PhD, co-authored three editions of “The Singing Book,” a leading college voice class textbook/anthology. The new 20th Anniversary 4th edition will be available February 2024 by Rowman & Littlefield.

2024 Van L. Lawrence Fellowship

Application Deadline: Nov. 15, 2023

The Van L. Lawrence Fellowship was created to honor Van L. Lawrence, M.D. for his outstanding contribution to voice, and particularly to recognize the importance of the interdisciplinary education he fostered among laryngologists and singing teachers. The Fellowship is a joint award from the Voice Foundation and the Foundation Heritage Fund of the NATS Endowment.

Candidates for the Van L. Lawrence Fellowship shall be:

1. A member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing who is actively engaged in teaching.
2. The Fellowship shall be awarded to candidates who have demonstrated excellence in their professions as singing teachers, and who have shown interest in and knowledge of voice science.

Members of NATS wishing to apply for the fellowship should write a letter of intent to The Voice Foundation along with your CV — combined into one PDF. Include the area and methods of your proposed study plan. E-mail: office@voicefoundation.org

- a. Current application of scientific knowledge in the studio;
- b. The area of intended study and/or research project and the study plan and methods;
- c. How the Fellowship and research project will benefit your teaching;
- d. NATS Chapter to which you belong;
- e. A detailed curriculum vita.

The fellowship will be awarded at the next Symposium: Care of the Professional Voice
May 29–June 2, 2024, in Philadelphia

For more information, contact The Voice Foundation at 215-735-7999 or email office@voicefoundation.org.
Visit nats.org for complete application instructions.



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