



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of TEACHERS of SINGING

inter nos

VOL. 57, NO. 2 • Fall 2024

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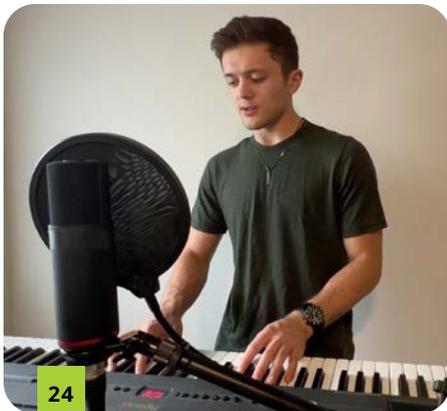
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The Circle of Life in the Association

By Allen Henderson, NATS Executive Director

As you read this column, those who teach on a schedule akin to an academic year are well into your fall seasons. Those who teach year-round have likely returned to a regular rhythm after offering various summer options for your students and clients. For others, work is a constant cycle of teaching and performing, coaching and collaborating, or composing and publishing without a specific cyclical schedule. This variety in how we work is one of the unique and wonderful aspects of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. For all practical purposes, NATS runs on a two-year cycle that culminates with our national conference. After each conference, we install new officers, reboot, refresh, and embark on a new two-year cycle (this marks the start of my ninth cycle as executive director).

The 58th National Conference in Knoxville was imbued with a palpable joy and excitement as we gathered for a time of professional development, performances, and the National Student Auditions semifinals and finals. I was constantly met with comments from regular attendees regarding the enjoyable and walkable location; the sense of joy that permeated our time together; the opportunities for networking, mentoring, and stimulating conversation; the inclusive and accessible programming; and the many ways our staff and planners made our time together a safe and welcoming environment for all voices to be heard and celebrated. I am grateful to our wonderful staff and our conference committee who worked tirelessly to plan and execute this event. Many of you have seen and/or heard social media posts or other stories about the event from colleagues, and I know some colleagues who expressed their FOMO at having commitments that prevented them from being there in person. There is not room in this edition to adequately highlight all the great times had, so those will have to live in our hearts and minds. A few perspectives are included, and I hope you will read about the impact such events have on our members and their students.

As a professional association representing members from all walks of life and with various perspectives on life and

a life in the arts, there are times when our association adjusts its programming and services to meet changing needs within our membership or their students and clients. Some changes are subtle but have a positive impact on the segment they serve while others have a more wide-ranging impact. Since 2020, there is no doubt that our profession has weathered a great deal of change and at times NATS has led the change. Other times NATS has followed the lead of others. Our staff and board of directors guide NATS through changing landscapes and new frontiers. As we embark on a new cycle, as part of our 2020-2025 strategic plan, we will be reviewing our products and services in depth in advance of the creation of our next strategic plan. You may be asked periodically to provide feedback and response regarding products and services NATS offers, and we hope you will eagerly provide your feedback so that we can adjust to better serve our members along with their students and clients.



Allen Henderson
NATS Executive Director

In the upcoming renewal cycle, you will notice new membership categories. Full and Associate members are now called Professional Members, and Student members are now Pre-Professional Members. We've also added a new category: Emerging Professional Members, which provides early-career teachers who are new to NATS reduced membership dues for up to five years as they establish their careers. Special thanks to our Membership Committee and outgoing VP for Membership Torin Chiles for their careful and considered work in crafting these adjustments and updates that were approved at our board meeting.

Journal of Singing continues to be a leading publication in our field. Rather than sell our journal to a publisher, NATS always has felt it important to publish the journal ourselves in order to maintain independence and provide the best journal we can offer our profession. Editor-in-Chief Lynn Holding has

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ushered in changes to columns and personnel, and you are already seeing the results of her stewardship of our journal. Thank you, Lynn! As with many journals, the cost of printing and postage continues to rise. As a result, the board has decided to provide JOS in digital format to all members as part of your annual dues. For those who, like me, enjoy holding the hard copy in our hands as we dog ear pages and underline and highlight passages, a publication fee of \$40 can be added to your dues by selecting the option to continue receiving hard copies during the renewal process. With this change, we join other sibling organizations like the College Music Society and National Association for Music Education who have been using this model for many years now.

I continue to be impressed by the dedication of our leadership as they listen and address current needs of our profession while also focusing on the future that is yet unknown before us. I hope you will engage in conversation with national board members and share your hopes and dreams for the future of our association. Choose a different one each week this fall and email them thanking them for their service and share at least one thing you hope our association will accomplish in the coming years. You can find their emails on the [Board of Directors](#) page on our website.

The future is bright for our profession and association, and your engagement is vital to ensure it remains so.

As always, I appreciate your feedback at allen@nats.org.

Let's get social!

Join and follow NATS on social media for the latest updates, videos, and engaging discussions with your fellow members.



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Mentoring on My Mind

By Cynthia Vaughn, Associate Editor for Independent Voices

I have been thinking about all of the people who have encouraged, helped, and mentored me over my career as a voice teacher. Many of those mentors were members of NATS, including “Mr. NATS,” Roy Delp, who served two terms as President of NATS and was the original Director of the NATS Intern Program. Roy Delp was a legend in NATS, and he had a passion for training future generations of voice teachers. As a brand new NATS member in the summer of 1984, I was fresh out of graduate school and attended my first national workshop in Boulder, Colorado. To be honest, it was a bit overwhelming to be in the presence of so many experienced and famous voice teachers from the U.S. and Canada. They all seemed to know each other. The first day, I stood off to the side, taking it all in. Across the room, a tall, authoritative man caught my eyes and walked over to me. I recognized him as President Delp, whose photo I had seen in the *Journal of Singing*. In his booming military voice, he welcomed me, asked where I was from (“Chicago, but originally from Colorado”) and was I a new NATS member



Roy Delp

(“Yes”). He then proceeded to introduce me to other NATS members — not as a student, but as a colleague. I still get goosebumps thinking about that moment. Over the years, I connected with Mr. Delp at every NATS conference and workshop, and he was always genuinely interested in where I was (I moved a lot!) and what I was doing. In the summer of 2001, I was helping my friend

and mentor Linda Snyder as she hosted the NATS Intern Program on the campus of University of Dayton. I had recently relocated from Ohio to Colorado, but I flew back to Dayton for the opportunity to make coffee, run errands, help wherever needed, and to be a fly on the wall for every masterclass, guest lecture, and recital. I loved it! Jean Westerman Gregg was the Director of the Program that year and we shared a dormitory suite, many stories, and a love of Graeter’s ice cream. Roy Delp was one of the Master Teachers and he invited Intern Todd Queen, my Colorado State University colleague, and I to host the NATS Intern Program at CSU in 2004. At that 2004 program, Delp invited me to be the Vocal Literature Coordinator and Publisher’s

Liaison for the NATS Intern Program beginning in 2005, a role I continued through 2012 before passing the torch to Tana Field. There is much to be said about being open to opportunities and simply being in the right place at the right time with the right people.

Other personal mentors have included my Chicago voice teacher Ronald T. Combs, composer Tom Fettke, Robert Edwin, Joan Boytim, and the late Meribeth Dayme, who became a lifelong friend and co-author of *The Singing Book* group-voice textbook and song anthology. Meribeth Dayme died in 2019 and the new fourth edition is dedicated to her memory.



Cynthia Vaughn
Associate Editor
for *Inter Nos*
CynthiaVaughn@icloud.com

Modern day colleagues, friends, and yes, mentors, include NATS Executive Director Allen Henderson who invited me to be Associate Editor of NATS *Inter Nos* “Independent Voices” in 2017, and former President Karen Brunssen, friend and international travel buddy, who still inspires me with her relentless drive, creative ideas, and vision for the future.

“The art of teaching is a complex topic involving content knowledge, communication and organization skills, as well as curiosity about how people learn. Given the variability in both singing pedagogy and how people acquire knowledge, the mentoring initiative committee was founded on the belief that teachers need a wide repertoire of strategies to address their students and careers.”

In 2019, Karen Brunssen, along with chair Jeanne Goffi-Fynn, Theresa Brancaccio, Carole Blankenship and others spearheaded the first NATS National Mentoring Initiative. “The art of teaching is a complex topic involving content knowledge, communication and organization skills, as well as curiosity about how people learn. Given the variability in both singing pedagogy and how people acquire knowledge, the mentoring initiative committee was founded on the belief that teachers need a wide repertoire of strategies to

address their students and careers.” Along with the well-established NATS Intern Program for early-career professionals, there are other paths for NATS members to connect with mentor teachers/colleagues.

NATS National Mentoring Collaborative (NNMC)

For a fee, NATS members can select an available Mentor Teacher to connect with online in a structured, but flexible collaboration. Over a designated 10-week period, each participant will schedule two one-hour online sessions with a mentor of their choice. Participants also share videos of their teaching OR schedule another collaborative online session to address specific interests or goals. Topics can range from teaching strategies and shared videos for feedback, to career goals such as navigating the transition from adjunct teaching to tenure track, or balancing performance and teaching. NNMC mentees also have the opportunity to connect with other mentor teachers and peers in two scheduled group Zoom meetings.

Conference Connections

Conference Connections, the newly named program formerly known as “Mentoring Over Coffee,” is held during NATS National Conferences. The new name captures the essence of the program, to facilitate connections between NATS members during the biennial national conference. This free program highlights the generous camaraderie of the NATS membership. Elizabeth Ann Benson has directed the program since 2020, following its establishment by Ian Howell in 2018. At the 2024 National Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee, 34 NATS members participated as mentors, and 21 participated as mentees, resulting in 55 mentoring connections. The mentoring partners sat down together to chat for an hour during the conference, fostering new connections within NATS. Responses to a follow-up survey suggest a high level of satisfaction with this program. “Conference Connections is a great example of practicing our [mission, vision, and values](#) within NATS,” Benson says. The connections made through mentoring bolster the [NATS Diversity and Inclusion statement](#), “to be a welcoming and supportive community of members and students who celebrate the unique identities, varied backgrounds, and experiences of all individuals.” (No additional fee for full conference registrants).

Over the past five years, I have had several opportunities to serve as a NATS mentor. One memorable experience



Emily DenBleyker and Cynthia Vaughn

paired me with a teacher who was in her 80s. She was being pressured by well-meaning family and friends to stop teaching and she was having doubts about the effectiveness of her teaching, and her own worth. I listened over lunch as she told me story after story about beloved students whose lives had been changed by her teaching. She began to sit a little taller and smile a little broader. She wanted some suggestions for teaching popular music so that she wasn't “behind the times,” and I steered her towards some great current resources for her and her students. As we ended our conversation, she was confident and re-energized about her own teaching and the value she still brought to her students. She was determined to keep teaching as long as she was physically able and as long as teaching continued to bring her joy. We ended our session with tears and a hug. She inspired me as much as I “mentored” her.

This past year, I connected with NATS member Emily DenBleyker for the National Mentoring Collaborative. When we met online, Emily was an American ex-pat living and teaching online in Lisbon, Portugal. Most of her students joined her on Zoom from the U.S. Emily is a Master of Arts candidate in voice pedagogy, studying online with the Voice Study Centre/University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She is energetic, positive, and passionate about teaching, especially working with beginning adults. Emily was very eager to take the next steps to share her research and writing. We connected immediately! In addition to our three one-hour online Zoom meetings over a period of several weeks, I gave her some options to explore, and she sent me her articles and presentation for feedback. One of her unpublished articles involved quite a bit of research and I suggested that



Cynthia Vaughn and Mary Gard



Cynthia Vaughn with Adam Dyjach



Cynthia Vaughn, Brittnee Simone, Deborah Dalton

she submit it to *Journal of Singing* for consideration. Another article, a how-to for virtual student recitals, was a good fit for “Independent Voice,” and I asked her to submit it to *Inter Nos*. Her article appears in this issue. Earlier, she had submitted a proposal for a conference presentation for the Knoxville 2024 conference that was not accepted, so I suggested that she rework her proposal as a poster paper. Emily was already ahead of me and was in the process of adapting her poster paper submission. I was delighted to finally meet Emily in person at the Knoxville NATS conference and to pose with her next to her selected poster paper! Since our first online meeting, Emily has relocated back to the U.S. and is living and teaching in the Pacific Northwest. No doubt we will stay in touch!

This summer, for the first time, I participated in the volunteer “Conference Connections” mentoring sessions in Knoxville. I had wonderful conversations with NATS members Mary Gard and Adam Dyjach. Mary and I talked about teaching group-voice, and Adam and I explored options to grow his independent studio. Both Mary and Adam were interested in NATS Intern Program, and I was able to give them information and suggestions, most importantly, “Don’t underestimate any portion of the application.” I not only learned about their teaching but also a bit about their personal lives. Congratulations to Adam on his recent wedding!

In addition to these structured opportunities, there is always the opportunity to simply make a new friend at a NATS conference, workshop or regional/chapter event. I kept bumping into Brittnee Simone at the Knoxville conference. We seemed to be attending all of the same sessions, including an invited discussion group for NATS National Mentoring Collaboration participants. When I found out that one of her long-time mentors is my friend and colleague Deborah Dalton, I knew I had an instant friend! That led

to all three of us meeting for dinner and the famed Cruze Farm ice cream. (I’m beginning to think that ice cream is an essential part of mentoring.) So, look around the room, say hello, and be open to a new connection, because ultimately that is what mentoring is about. It is about sharing our collective experiences, listening, respecting, and learning from each other.

I’d love to hear from you! Share some of your best mentoring moments. What are some other ways that NATS might improve mentoring initiatives? What would you most like to receive or give through a mentoring connection? Is there better language that we could use instead of “mentor/mentee”? I’m also seeking email submissions for future issues of *Inter Nos* “Independent Voices.”

In this issue Jeremy Ryan Mossman introduces his work with Feldenkrais, fascia, and biotensegrity. Deborah Conquest discusses how to help students who are disappointed with audition results, and Emily DenBleyker shows us how to plan, produce, and present a pre-recorded virtual recital with online students. Email cynthiavaughn@icloud.com

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 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 faculties of Colorado State University, Cedarville College, and Art Connects International. Publications include *The Singing Book* group-voice textbook and song anthology with co-author Meribeth Dayme. The new 4th edition with editor Matthew Hoch was released July 2024 by Rowman & Littlefield/Bloomsbury Publishing and NATS Books.

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Highlights from the NATS 58th national conference in Knoxville

Hundreds from across the voice industry convened for the 58th NATS national conference from June 28 to July 2 in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee, and the Knoxville Convention Center. The event featured esteemed guests including tenor Lawrence Brownlee, keynote speaker Nicole Robinson, speech language pathologist and singing voice specialist Kerrie Obert, film director James Kicklighter, bluegrass artist and educator Dan Boner, collaborative pianist Kathleen Kelly, as well as cabaret artist and NATS members Eden Casteel and Amanda Reckonwith, among many others. It was a wide-ranging and inclusive conference environment for members to network and learn together.

Held at the historic Tennessee Theatre, the conference’s standout moment for many was the Saturday night concert by world-renowned Lawrence Brownlee with pianist Kevin J. Miller. Brownlee delighted the audience with selections from his Grammy Award-nominated album, “Rising,” showcasing works by today’s leading African-American composers with poetry from the Harlem Renaissance. The setlist included selections by Robert Owens, Jeremiah Evans, Margaret Bonds, Jasmine Barnes, Brandon Spencer, Carlos Simon, Damien Sneed, Shawn Okpebholo, and Joel Thompson.

The concert concluded with multiple standing ovations and a series of encores, making it an unforgettable night for NATS members and locals alike. Brownlee also led a performance class the day before at the Knoxville Convention Center.



Another conference highlight included the 2024 National Student Auditions, where more than 400 student-singers participated in the semifinal rounds across 35 categories — including 16 new categories in Commercial Music, Children, and Youth. Winners received more than \$84,000 in prizes. The Hall Johnson Spiritual Competition also was included in this year’s NSA categories.

David Juncos and Dana Zenobi were named co-winners of “[Best Poster Paper](#)” for their poster, “Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) Administered by Singing Teachers: A Tool for Managing Music Performance Anxiety.” Juncos and Zenobi represented one of nearly 30 accepted poster papers.

(continues)



NATS honored Glendower Jones, founder of Classical Vocal Reprints, and dedicated NATS member Dan Johnson-Wilmot with [Lifetime Achievement Awards](#) at the gala celebration banquet on July 1. Jones has been a pivotal figure for nearly four decades in the singing community and has been known being able to locate music that may be otherwise hard to find. Johnson-Wilmot, a professor for more than 50 years at Vierbo University, has served NATS in various leadership roles. He served as the Wisconsin Chapter auditions chair for more than 30 years. He has been an integral member of the auditions team at the NATS National Student Auditions since its inception and has served as coordinator. He also served as region governor and Vice President for Membership on the NATS Board of Directors.



This year's gathering marked the 80th anniversary of the association. In celebration, the association established the 80th Anniversary Fund, in honor of longtime volunteers Karen Brunssen, Carole Blankenship, and Dan Johnson-Wilmot, who have worked tirelessly to strengthen the NATS community. The goal of the fund is to name three NSA prizes in the classical category after these esteemed individuals. Fundraising efforts will continue for the rest of 2024.

Additionally, the inaugural Richard Sjoerdsma Award for Excellence in Writing was presented to NATS member Melissa



Treinkman at the gala banquet. The award, which comes with a \$500 cash prize, recognizes the best article published in the *Journal of Singing* over the past two years.

Thanks to the generous support of the [conference sponsors](#) who help make this event possible every two years, NATS members and friends came away with many valuable experiences from the conference. Plans are underway for the next conference in San Antonio, Texas, July 3-7, 2026. Those who missed the Knoxville conference, can purchase recordings of individual sessions or packages through the [Live Learning Center](#). Full conference attendees have free access to all session recordings through February 28, 2025.

For ongoing updates, follow the National Association of Teachers of Singing on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#), where new content is posted throughout the year.



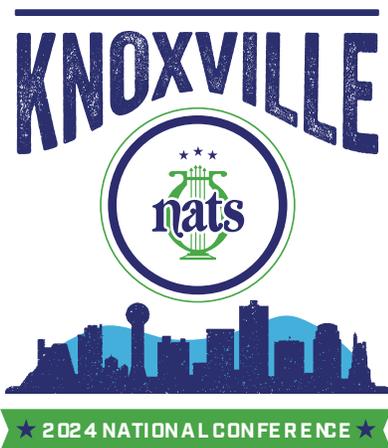


Studio photo courtesy of VOIX DE VIVRE.

Missed the 2024 National Conference?

It's not too late to see what the excitement was about! Packages are now available for purchase.

When you log in to the Live Learning Center, you'll experience a fabulous user-friendly platform. Our partners at Multiview have worked vigorously to update the site with new features including a faster load time, sleek look, and effortless navigation. Additionally, this website is entirely mobile friendly on all devices.



Email multiviewmediasupport@multiview.com
for member access.

2024 Nats 58th National Conference Limited Time Offers

Member price for Full set | Unlimited - \$445

Member price for Full set | 1 Year - \$425

Member price for Full set | 6 months (Comp/attendees only)

Member price for individual session purchase | \$12.50

Pick 10 | \$99 member / \$119 non-member

Pick 20 | \$169 member / \$199 non-member

All premium workshops | \$60

REMINDER to our 2024 National Conference attendees. All 2024 National Conference registrants have received an email providing **FREE access** to all of the session videos until February 28, 2025.

Email multiviewmediasupport@multiview.com for assistance.

Visit the URL below to access the Nats Live Learning nats.sclivelearningcenter.com

2024 National Student Auditions Winners

NATS held the National Student Auditions semifinal and final rounds live on June 27-29 in conjunction with the NATS 58th National Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. Having advanced through multiple levels of auditions, NSA national semifinalists were adjudicated to be one of the top 15 singers in their age and level of training category from over 1,000 national preliminary entries. This year's national semifinal auditions featured more than 400 student-singers. Sixteen new NSA categories in Commercial Music, Children, and Youth debuted this year.

The top 3 student-singers in each of this year's 35 NSA categories advanced from semifinals to national finals. In total, winners received more than \$84,000 in prizes this year. (View NSA 2024 national [finalists](#) and [semifinalists](#))

This year's NSA categories included the biennial Hall Johnson Spiritual Competition. In the next NSA cycle, the biennial American Negro Spirituals categories will be offered.

The *Kim and Karen Brunssen Awards* were presented to the first-place winners in each of the Children and Youth Classical categories. These new awards were funded by Dan Johnson-Wilmot in honor of former NATS President, Karen Brunssen, and her late husband, Kim.

The Dorothy Sawatski Prize was awarded to this year's first place winner of the lower classical treble voice category,



The inaugural final rounds of the NSA Commercial Music Categories took place Saturday, June 29.

Poppy Teague. NATS member and former member of the NATS Board of Directors, Nita Herrick-Colpitts, provided this prize in honor of her teacher Dorothy Sawatski who was a charter member of NATS Southern Region and served as its region governor for multiple years.

The Roberta M. Stephen Memorial Scholarship for an outstanding performance of a Canadian art song in the post-high school or advanced classical categories of NSA was awarded to Rachel Currie for her performance of

2024 winners in Musical Theatre NSA Categories 7 & 8



NATS PROGRAMS

“Requiescat” composed by Matthew Emery. Named for the founder of the first Canadian NATS chapter, Stephen was part of a musical family from Southern Alberta, Canada. Roberta Stephen was active as a teacher, composer, and publisher, who passed away in July 2021. The funding for this award in her honor was begun by NATS of Southern Alberta and the Vancouver Chapter of NATS.

The 2024 staff collaborative pianists were Jing-Fang Huang, Valerie Trujillo, Bernadette Lo, Grace Berardo, Brandon Coffey, Jodi Goble, Lance Bastian, Nia Brown, Susie Whiting, Lisa Willson, Slade Trammell, Joseph North, Kate Wogoman, Dustin Lin, Steve Sensenig, Matthew Mimbs, Timothy McReynolds, Nick Klein, and Eileen Downey, who also served as Coordinator of Staff Pianists.

Kenneth Bozeman, Marcía Porter, Danielle Watson, and Robert Wells adjudicated finals in the classical categories and the Hall Johnson Spiritual Competition. Julie Krugman, Matt Edwards, and Matthew Hoch adjudicated the finals in the musical theatre categories. Matt Edwards, Lyndia Johnson, and Trineice Robinson-Martin adjudicated the finals in the commercial music categories.

The 2024 National NSA Team in Knoxville included Alisa Belflower, Dan Johnson-Wilmoth, Ellie Seligmann, Mark McQuade, Casey Carter, Melinda Brou, Rebecca Salter, Natalie Arduino, Stephanie Beinlich, Rebecca Coberly, Brian Leeper,



Karen Brunssen congratulates Brendan McCanta, the inaugural first-prize winner of NSA CL 1 - Children Classical Voices.

Cynthia Longoria, Will Perkins, Christina Ray, and Marie Smithwick Bird, and Perry Ward.

Special thanks to all NSA coordinators, committees, panels, adjudicators, donors, collaborative pianists, the University of Tennessee, all participating student-singers and their NATS member/teachers. [View Finals Program](#)

Congratulations to all for another great year of NSA!

[All 2024 Winners](#)



2024 NSA Winners of Classical Categories and Hall Johnson Spirituals Competition

NATIONAL Student Auditions

National Association of Teachers of Singing

NATS National Student Auditions are headed to Philadelphia!

The excitement continues with cash prizes after two national levels of auditions to be held June 26–28, 2025, at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

REGION – QUALIFYING AUDITIONS

Audition in YOUR Region's NSA Event.
Singers placing 1st through 5th in each national qualifying category advance to National Preliminary Online Screening.

NATIONAL ONLINE SCREENING

Friday, April 11, 2025 – Deadline for online digital submissions.

SEMIFINALS AND FINALS

Top 15 student-singers in national Semifinals
Top 3 in national Finals
Cash prizes awarded to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place

ELIGIBILITY

All singers ages 30 and younger
on September 1, 2024.
(no lower-age limit)



TOTAL PRIZES:
MORE THAN
\$85,000

FIRST PLACE, SECOND PLACE and THIRD PLACE prizes will be awarded in each category.

**37
CATEGORIES
FOR 2024–2025!**

See NATS.org for
full details.



See complete regulations and
repertoire requirements at

nats.org

In Review: 2024 NATS Intern Program

By Sarah Ashcroft VandenBrink, Christina Ray, Carissa Scroggins and Justin T. Swain

Editor's Note: The [2024 NATS Intern Program](#) was held May 29 – June 6, 2024, on the campus of Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, with 16 interns. The 2024 master teachers included: Alfonse Anderson (University of Nevada, Las Vegas), Melissa Foster (Northwestern University), Mike Ruckles (Mike Ruckles Voice Studio), and Louise Toppin (University of Michigan). The collaborative piano interns worked with pianist Donna Loewy (University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music).

Schedule

Each morning began with master teacher cohort observations where the Interns rotated teaching volunteer students for one another. After a full morning of teaching, the cohorts broke for a lunch break and received feedback while having meaningful discussions on different techniques and questions that came up over the course of the teaching morning. Afternoons were filled with performance classes, master teacher presentations, and Intern mini-presentations. Dinners were a combination of battery recharging, reflecting on new discoveries, and socializing with new colleagues and friends. The program culminated in a final performance given by the volunteer students. It was a joy to see the evolution these singers took in such a short period of time. It was a beautiful celebration and embodied the spirit of NATS and its mission and values.

Cohort and Individual Reflections



Christina Ray

Participating in the 2024 NATS Intern Program as part of Mike Ruckles' cohort was a profoundly transformative journey and a personal dream come true. The expert feedback we received on our teaching methods not only refined our skills but also deepened our understanding

of musical theatre voice pedagogy. We were introduced to invaluable tools and techniques that have significantly enhanced our teaching toolbox, allowing us to better serve our students and their unique needs. Equally enriching was learning from other interns, cohorts, and master teachers, whose diverse perspectives and experiences broadened our horizons and fostered a collaborative spirit. Beyond professional growth, the bonds we formed with each other

are lifelong, creating a network of support and camaraderie that will endure throughout our careers. This experience has left an indelible mark on me, for which I am forever grateful and irrevocably changed.

— Christina Ray



Justin T. Swain

For the past few years, I'd considered applying for the program and constantly second-guessed myself. Prior to my full-time appointment at my institution, I questioned whether I was "good enough" to be selected and truly let my own fear of rejection stop me from applying.

Upon arriving at FSU, I was immediately greeted with warmth from every intern, master teacher, and person affiliated with the program. Getting to know the other interns, sharing our experiences over lunch and in the evenings, and both observing and receiving feedback from my cohort's master teacher, Mike Ruckles, were truly the highlights of the program for me. I've made new lifelong friends, developed incredible partnerships, and walked away from the entire experience with new tools I've been able to immediately implement into my own teaching. If you're on the fence about applying for similar reasons as myself, I encourage you to "shoot your shot." Focus not on what could go wrong, but instead opening yourself to the possibilities of all the great things that *can* happen. I am forever grateful to have been selected as an intern and look forward to welcoming in the next class of interns!

— Justin T. Swain



Carissa Scroggins

At the 2024 NATS Intern Program, we were bolstered as teachers. I learned much from the master teachers, but the feedback, support and delight from other interns afterwards — continuing discussions at lunch, hanging out before bed, walking to our next thing — were a constant

source of encouragement. The growth we saw in our students was amazing. Their courage to study intensely over a short period of time with strange new teachers, trying new ideas, tossing out ones that didn't work, all culminating in a concert where they were able to bravely show what they'd learned was inspiring.



The 2024 NATS Intern Program included 16 intern participants, 5 master teachers, a site host, and a program coordinator. The group gathered on the campus of Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida.

In addition to teaching, we were given opportunities to sing in masterclasses and present mini lectures. Working with Mike Ruckles on my belt (and hearing his coveted “Yeah, that’s the sound we want for 8 shows a week!”), discovering new resonance possibilities with Louise Toppin (and watching Alfonse Anderson barely contain himself at the sounds she was able to coax out), finding collaborative nuance with Donna Loewy, practicing Mandarin diction, hearing new arrangements of Acadian folk tunes, and navigating publishers and composer’s estates to make pieces known were just some of the incredible experiences. I am truly grateful to have been a 2024 NATS Intern.

— Carissa Scroggins

opportunity to grow and explore. What will stay with me throughout my career is the *support* we all received. What a gift! When divided into our teaching cohorts we received encouragement from our master teachers. During our mini-presentations, the Interns all listened with rapt attention and asked thoughtful questions. Through generous donations, we all received books and anthologies to build our personal music libraries. Every person needs a team of people to rely on, and knowing that I now have a network of teachers spread throughout the nation walking by my side throughout this career is something I will never take for granted.

— Sarah Ashcroft VandenBrink



Sarah Ashcroft VandenBrink

To say that the NATS Intern Program was life-changing would be an understatement. To have a program such as this, curated to benefit the growth of singing teachers, is astonishing and I will forever be grateful to have had the opportunity to work and learn with such talent.

Whether it was learning how to yodel (yes, yodeling!), how to teach Rock ‘n’ Roll, or measuring Cepstral Peak Prominence, all Interns were treated as colleagues and were given the

Thank you

Thank you to Carole Blankenship for your organizational leadership of the 2024 NATS Intern Program. Thank you, Marcía Porter, for being such an amazing and gracious host. Thank you to the donors of the NATS Intern Program who make this financially possible. Thank you to the master teachers: Alfonse Anderson, Melissa Foster, Donna Loewy, Mike Ruckles, and Louise Toppin for giving so generously of your time, wisdom, and expertise. We are all forever grateful to this amazing program and organization for affording such deeply meaningful opportunities to its early career members.



ANNOUNCING THE 2025 NATS Intern Program

May 20 – 30, 2025

University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky

Director: Diana Allan, NATS Past President

Local Coordinator: Katherine Calcamuggio Donner, University of Louisville

Vocal Literature Liaison: Tana Field, Murray State University

The NATS Intern Program is an exciting and innovative venture that seeks to pair experienced and recognized master teachers with talented early career members of NATS. We invite both independent and academic voice teachers and collaborative pianists to apply. Each voice intern teaches lessons to two students and performs in master classes under the supervision of a master teacher. Collaborative piano interns accompany lessons, master classes, and other sessions as appropriate, and coach students under the supervision of the collaborative piano master teacher.

FACULTY: MASTER TEACHERS

VOICE

- Justin John Moniz (NYU Steinhardt)
- Sandra Oberoi (Harmony - The Music School)
- Amelia Rollings Bigler (Coastal Carolina University)
- Noel Smith (Noel Voice Studio)

COLLABORATIVE PIANO

- Rachelle Jonck (Bel Canto Boot Camp)

REQUIREMENTS

A voice applicant must be a Full or Associate member of NATS in good standing with no more than five years of full-time teaching or the part-time equivalent. Working as a graduate teaching assistant does not count towards the five-year limit. Holding a master's degree or higher is preferable but not required. A collaborative piano applicant does not have to be a NATS member (although preference is given to those who are), but membership is required if accepted into the program. Applicants should be at the beginning of their careers with no more than approximately five years of full-time collaborative work/teaching/coaching or the part-time equivalent.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Complete the application form online at [NATS.org](https://www.nats.org), which will include (1) the upload of a resume and headshot. (2) Two letters of reference (solicited and collected electronically during the application process). (3) A brief statement addressing the applicant's teaching philosophy/philosophy of collaborative work with singers, and motivation for participating in the program. (4) Web links to performance recordings, and (5) web links to video recordings of a sample lesson or coaching.



Applicants must apply online
[nats.org](https://www.nats.org)

Deadline: Dec. 15, 2024



Testimonials from recent interns:

"This was an unforgettable experience and I am forever grateful to NATS and the NATS Intern Program! I will cherish everything I have gained from this experience for the rest of my career. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!"

"I am so grateful to NATS for creating this program. It has been an incredible, heart and soul filling experience. I have made friends and colleagues for life from this event."

"Just thank you. I feel incredibly grateful and humbled to now include myself among the NATS interns. I learned so much . . . I feel like I am still processing the knowledge gained, and the relationships formed will last a lifetime."

Now What? After a Disappointing Audition

By Deborah Conquest

One question I often hear from my students is, "So, I didn't get cast. Now what?" As voice teachers, we empathize with their disappointment, but this question presents a valuable teaching opportunity. Here are some suggestions we can encourage our students to pursue between performance opportunities.

1. Take a Dance or Acting Classes

Encouraging our students to expand their skills can make them more versatile performers. Dance classes improve movement and stage presence, which are crucial for both musical theater and opera. Acting classes enhance character interpretation and emotional expression. Both types of classes will boost their performance abilities and confidence in auditions.

2. Improve Musical and Vocal Skills

Continuous improvement is key. I find the pauses between shows to be the most productive for working on vocal technique; when they're not busy learning a role. Listening to new repertoire or new composers can deepen their musical understanding. Joining a choir or vocal ensemble helps with blending voices and understanding harmony, making them more versatile singers.

3. Practice Sightreading and Cold Reading

Sightreading and cold reading are critical for auditions. When I say sightreading, I remind them of callbacks where they may have to sing new music. No one is going to drill them on solfege, but the casting team might say "Here's a song from the show. You have five minutes. Here's your starting note." Or they might hand the student a script and ask them, on the spot, to read for a character or characters. The more prepared a student is, the less stressful sightreading and cold reading is. These are skills that can be practiced and improved.



Deborah Conquest



4. Develop New Repertoire

Evaluate their current audition book and identify any gaps in styles or genres. I give my studio members a sort of template of musical theatre styles and genres. The same could be done with a five-aria audition book. Select lesser-known pieces that showcase their strengths and versatility. A diverse and well-prepared repertoire makes them more adaptable and ready for various audition opportunities.

5. Engage in Performance Opportunities

Suggest participation in community theater, open mic nights, or collaborations with other musicians. Low-stakes auditions and performances build confidence and stage presence, keep them active, and provide valuable practice.

6. Reflect and Set Goals

Encourage students to reflect on their audition experience. What went well? What could be improved? Use this reflection to set specific, measurable goals for their next audition. Clear goals provide direction and motivation.

7. Foster a Positive Attitude

Rejection is part of the audition process. Encourage students to stay positive and

persistent. I always say casting is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The artistic team has to figure out how to best plug in all the pieces. Remind them that every audition is a learning experience and an opportunity to grow.

8. Promote Networking and Mentorship

Building a network of fellow performers, teachers, and industry professionals provides support and new opportunities. Encourage attendance at industry events, workshops, and masterclasses to meet new people and learn from their experiences. Seeking mentorship from experienced performers offers valuable guidance and insights.

9. Emphasize Mental and Physical Health

Maintaining mental and physical health is crucial for sustained performance excellence. Encourage self-care routines like regular exercise, healthy eating, and adequate sleep. Activities like yoga, meditation, or spending time with loved ones enhance overall performance and resilience.

10. Update Their Performer Resume

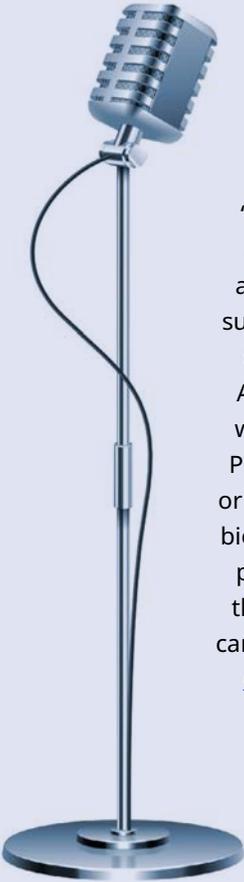
Ensure their resume is up-to-date and reflects recent performances and training. Check for the latest templates and styles on Playbill or Backstage. Highlight unique skills or experiences that set them apart from other performers.

Conclusion

A disappointing audition is not the end but an opportunity to grow and improve. By taking classes, enhancing skills, preparing new repertoire, seeking performance opportunities, and maintaining a positive attitude, students can make the most of the time between auditions.

Remember, our industry often involves more auditioning than performing. Every experience is a step towards becoming a better performer. Embrace the journey, learn from each experience, and continue to develop your craft. With dedication and perseverance, students will see progress and success in future auditions and performances. Encourage them to keep moving forward, and they'll be ready to shine when the next audition comes around.

Deborah Conquest is an accomplished performer and vocal coach based in Rochester, New York. She trains singing actors worldwide and wears many hats as a performer, vocal coach, stage mom, and proud Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music



What's your story?

"Independent Voices" articles and ideas may be submitted any time; however, the annual submission deadlines are July 15 (fall) and January 15 (spring). Articles may be 1,000 to 4,000 words, preferably first person. Please include a headshot and/or topical photo(s) and a 50-word bio. Articles accepted for (digital) publication will be available in the [public area](#) of [nats.org](#) and can be freely shared online. Email CynthiaVaughn@icloud.com.

alum. Conquest loves hiking, rockabilly music, competitive powerlifting, house plants, and chocolate cake — not necessarily in that order. Fun fact: she started her career as the "Ivory Snow Baby" and became a SAG-AFTRA member at six months old. Learn more at [conquestvoicestudio.com](#)



NATSCast, the official podcast network of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, has established a varied, credible and entertaining group of podcasts featuring a myriad of topics — from the business of singing to voice health, teaching singers (of course!), and even chatting with Broadway stars.

Visit [nats.org](#) for more information.



What Are You Willing to Give Up?

By Cynthia Vaughn

On July 2, I learned that my first professional (post-college) voice teacher died in 2024. As the "In Memoriam" names were read aloud at the NATS Conference closing business meeting, I gasped to hear the name "Ronald T. Combs." Tears rolled down my cheeks as memories filled my mind of Dr. Combs and our lessons in Chicago in the mid-1980s. I arrived in Chicago with a freshly minted master's degree in vocal performance and had already been singing successfully in the San Francisco Bay Area, singing roles with smaller opera companies and receiving the East Bay Opera Young Artist Award. I eagerly relocated to the Chicago area, where my husband



Ronald T. Combs

had started a new job while I completed my final semester of grad school. I was so excited to continue my singing career in this new city. Before I even started auditioning, I looked for a voice teacher. Dr. Ronald Combs was highly regarded, and I was thrilled that he had a spot for me in his home studio. I loved my lessons! Unlike my college lessons, which included a broad and appropriate range of musicianship skills, languages, and classical genres and repertoire, Dr. Combs specialized in the technical facility and roles that I would specifically audition for and perform as a young light lyric coloratura soubrette soprano. My technique flourished under his tutelage and my confidence soared as I began to audition for Chicago area opera companies, professional choral ensembles, operetta, and professional studio recording. I performed with Opera Works and a children's opera company that toured the Tri-State, I performed Gilbert & Sullivan leading soprano roles with the Savoy-Aires and Chicago Gilbert & Sullivan Series (which



Cynthia Vaughn

performed the entire 14-show G&S canon in a single season in a black box theater with piano), I sang soprano solos with a few suburban orchestras and choirs, placed in a competition I don't remember, and was a studio vocalist for choral demos with Hope Publishing. In other words, I was doing well!

"Do you want this career more than anything? More than relationships, more than family? More than air?"

After I'd studied with Dr. Combs for about a year I asked him, during a lesson, for an honest evaluation. "Do you think I have what it takes for an international singing career?" He paused a long time, before replying, "No. I don't think you naturally have enough killer instinct." I was stunned but he didn't give me time to respond. He went on, "Talent wise, you are in the top five percent of students I've worked with. You have a beautiful voice, you are pretty, you are very musical, and you work very hard. However, I see how happy you are in your life, with your husband, with your new house in the suburbs. Success comes at a cost. What are you willing to give up? Do you want this career more than anything? More than relationships, more than family? More than air? My most successful students live out of suitcases. They are always traveling and it's a lonely life. Is that what you want?" I didn't answer and he left me to think about it as his next student arrived. As I drove home from the city to the suburbs, I thought about his words and at my next lesson I had an answer. "No. I'm not ready to give up the life I have now." As I recall, he looked relieved and said, "I believe you will have a satisfying career and will continue to perform locally and regionally. And you'll have a lot of students because you're good and people like you." And then we sang warmups. I wish I could tell Dr. Combs, forty years later, that he was right. Rest in peace.

Virtual Recitals: Using Technology to Increase Participation and Engagement

By Emily DenBleyker

Like many voice teachers, I moved my studio online when the pandemic began in 2020. I found that many of the challenges that come with teaching online were easily mitigated, and my students didn't seem to mind and even appreciated the ability to continue taking lessons when so many other things were unavailable. Ultimately, I decided to continue teaching exclusively online, which allowed me to start teaching students all over the world. In fact, I ended up moving abroad myself!

Despite all the benefits, this did raise some obvious challenges when it came to putting on a recital where students could share their craft. We did our first online recital in August 2022, sharing pre-recorded videos. It was a success, so we repeated it the following year, and plan to continue this year.

The technology for a virtual recital is very flexible and can be as simple or as complicated as you would like it to be.

In fact, even if my students and I were in the same location and physically able to present an in-person recital, I would continue to present virtual recitals, or at least offer a virtual option for recitals. I found that pre-recorded recital performances spark students' creativity and give them agency over their educational experience, allowing them to share their songs in a way that can feel more personal. It also invites the participation of students who would not choose to join in a traditional in-person recital, making music and performing more accessible. Also, on a more practical note, using pre-recorded videos was more reliable than streaming live performances.

Because the option of virtual recitals is relatively new, there are very few resources for teachers who'd like to explore this option. I'd like to share how I approach producing a fully digital, pre-recorded recital, as I believe that other teachers and their students could benefit from organizing similar events.



Emily DenBleyker

Philosophy

When I've discussed virtual recitals with teachers in the past, one of questions I've been asked is, "But how will students learn to perform live? How will they build those skills?" This is a valid question, and this format doesn't teach those skills at an advanced level. For my studio, that's okay. Most of my students are adult beginning singers who are learning to sing for the love of it. Most don't really want to perform publicly, at least in a formal capacity. My few students who are high-level singers already have professional careers or are comfortable performing, and so a recital wouldn't teach them anything they don't already know.

The reason I love doing virtual recitals is because it allows students to participate on their own terms. The point of a virtual recital is the joy of sharing music, not formal performance practice. Many of the students who have participated in my studio's virtual recitals would not have participated in an in-person recital. This virtual arrangement lets them record and re-record and re-re-record until they are happy with their performance. For a studio with more students who would like to perform live, a hybrid recital with both live and pre-recorded performances could give students the opportunity to choose their mode of participation.

Technological Practices

This is probably the most intimidating aspect of a virtual recital: the technology. As independent voice teachers, we often end up acquiring many skills that are not directly related to teaching or singing, and managing technology should be one of them. Thankfully, the technology for a virtual recital is very flexible and can be as simple or as complicated as you would like it to be. I've shared how I do things below, which is only slightly more complex than the most basic version.

Recording the Performances

For my student's videos, I ask them to do three things when recording:

1. Record on their newest piece of technology, whether it's a phone, computer, or an actual camera.
2. Record the video in landscape orientation. Reduce background noise as much as possible (turn off fans, don't be too near to a pet, etc.) and try to avoid filming in front of a window.
3. Record the vocal track separately from the accompaniment track. This usually means playing the accompaniment track (usually a karaoke track from YouTube) in headphones while singing along for the video recording, and then sending a link to the track they used. This allows the editor (you) to control the levels of the voice and track separately. It is possible to have them record with a live accompanist, but ask that they make a quick test recording to check the sound levels before they record the actual performance.

Other than that, the creative aspects are completely up to them. Some students will submit videos with a traditional “park and bark” setup like you might see in a live recital, while others will create full music videos or submit videos of them playing with their band or singing in unique locations. Some students may also prefer to use videos that don't show their faces. And, of course, sometimes there will be a video that doesn't fit the guidelines, but in the end, I've found that audiences are more excited about the creative aspect of the videos and diversity of submissions and are not bothered by any technical shortcomings or inconsistencies.

The choice to have students record their own videos is an important part of what makes these virtual recitals exciting, but it can bring its own challenges. Some students may be discouraged by the prospect of having to record on their own, and some may have difficulty figuring out how to set up their recordings. However, these students can be encouraged by reminding them they are not being judged on the quality of their recording or performance; rather, it is their participation and effort that is valued.

Teachers may also offer their students recording support. Remotely, this often looks like talking through the student's recording plan and affirming their choices or suggesting changes. You can also utilize Zoom's recording feature to record the performance for your student. If the teacher is in a similar locale as their students, they could have useful materials like ring lights and microphones available for students to borrow. If the teacher has a physical studio, they could even set up a “recording zone” where students could come to record.

As with any recital, there is also work involved in encouraging participation and getting students to record on time. My



Editing Virtual Recital



Virtual Recital Title Card

students know that while I encourage them to participate, I will never force them to do so, and they can change their mind about participating at any time, up to the date of the recital itself. Of course, I also set deadlines for confirming participation and for the video submission (more on this later).

Editing the Videos

After the students submit their individual videos, I edit them together into one single cohesive recital video. Personally, I use Adobe Premiere Pro, which is a professional video editing software available for a monthly fee. Truthfully, however, you don't need this level of power — free software like iMovie should work just as well.

Using Canva, I create a simple title card for each student that plays before their video which includes their name, pronouns, location (if they'd like), and the title of the song. A good practice is to leave the title up for three to five seconds, and to leave one second of blank space in between videos. I generally don't do much (or any) editing to the audio itself, outside of lining up the vocal and backing tracks and adjusting the general volume. Additionally, it's important to



Student videos:

1. Intermediate student sings Don't Know Why (Norah Jones)
2. Intermediate student sings Count the Stars (We the Kingdom)
3. Professional level student sings Something's Coming (West Side Story)
4. Beginning student sings Valerie (Amy Winehouse)
5. Intermediate student sings Unusual Way (Nine)
6. Intermediate student sings Call Me (Blondie) with her ukelele rock band

make sure the volume of each video is set to a similar level. However, one of the advantages of more powerful software such as Premiere is the ability to clean up noisy recordings (for example, reducing a background hum). Occasionally, I will splice together two takes (if they've submitted two takes) or fix a flub — this recital is meant to be fun, show people's best work, and give them a boost of self-confidence, not be an audition.

Once the volume is set, the title cards are in place, and any spot fixes are done, the video is ready to be exported out of the editing software and saved as a video file. If editing a video like this seems intimidating, consider reaching out to see if anyone in your network feels up to the task. The type of editing involved is quite simple, so it's likely not a huge ask if they already have the skills.

Sharing the Recital

Once the recital video is done, there are many ways to present the recital. If you'd like to present the recital entirely online, screen sharing on a Zoom call allows people all over the world to watch the video. Personally, I like this option because it's accessible and Zoom is free for attendees (I have a professional account). As long as you have a good internet connection, the video is unlikely to lag or de-synchronize from the audio, so consider plugging into an ethernet cable instead of relying on Wi-Fi. You can also encourage the audience to share positive feedback in the chat. I have never had an issue with unkindness in the chat, but it is a good

idea to monitor the chat so that you can delete anything negative. I also like to have fun facts about each performer or performance ready to share.

Of course, a studio with local students could schedule an in-person "watch party," which could still include remote students and family watching through Zoom. In that scenario, the in-person group would be watching the video as it is shared on the Zoom call.

Timeline

Of course, the timeline will be based on you and your students' schedules and needs. The following schedule has worked for my studio:

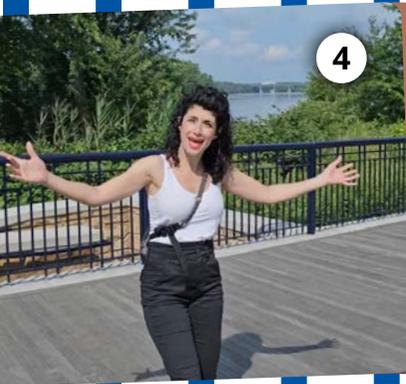
- Three to four months before the recital: Send an email telling students the date of the recital and what would be involved if they chose to participate
- Two months before the recital: Ask students to confirm participation and song choice
- Two weeks before the recital: Deadline for video submissions. Editing begins.
- One week before recital: If sharing the recital online, send out the Zoom link so students can send it to friends and family

This allows students to consider their participation, plan their performance, and record their videos without feeling rushed.

What Students Think of Virtual Recitals

"One of the things that I like a lot about the virtual recital is that it can be pre-recorded. As someone who takes lessons for the fun of singing rather than public performance, it really lets me put my best foot forward and removes the stress and anxiety of a public performance."

"Positive aspects: It's fun to see the creative ways people take advantage of the online format. For example, I did a



Questions To Ask Yourself Before Organizing A Virtual Recital

- Do I have students who would benefit from the option to perform virtually?
- Do my students have the skills to be able to film their own videos? Are there ways that I could support those that may feel intimidated by the technology?
- Do I feel as though I could learn the skills necessary to edit the videos? If not, could I reach out to someone else who does have those skills?
- What would be the best way to share the recital videos — in-person, virtual, or hybrid?

“virtual sing-along” where my instructor added the lyrics of my chorus as a caption to my performance. Also, I like having the ability to re-record my performance if the first try isn’t up to par. Negative: I do enjoy mingling with like-minded folks in person whenever possible, so I do miss that aspect. And there is value in practicing live performance. (The latter is not a strong motivator for me, though, since performing for audiences is not my goal.)”

“Being an adult beginning singer is inherently vulnerable. Even with a supportive teacher and a safe virtual learning environment, I often feel nervous singing in regular lessons, and for me, an in-person live recital would be a nightmare scenario. Virtual recitals have allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and do something I never thought possible — earnestly sing in front of people I don’t know. The song choice and presentation are entirely up to me, making this a fun creative exercise. I can show my face or not, and record as many takes as I want to. Virtual recitals have helped me grow more confident as a singer and a person.”

“I like virtual recitals. I feel much more inclined to participate in a virtual recital because I am more relaxed and not self-conscious. Plus, I have the chance to correct my mistakes.”

“I’m an amateur. Most of my experiences with participating in recitals have been virtual ones. Getting a song down to the point that you would actually share it with other humans is a challenge but getting a proper setup to record oneself for a virtual recital is near impossible. But you somehow cobble a setup together and record yourself a billion times and chose the one that makes you least ill and send it in. Seeing everyone else’s efforts and results is worth all the work.”

Final Thoughts

If you’re asking yourself, “Should I organize a virtual or hybrid recital?”, the answer is probably yes. Allowing students to submit pre-recorded videos makes music performance more accessible and equitable, and more students are likely to participate. It also lets remote students feel more connected to the studio community. While it can be intimidating at first, the technological details and overall structure are incredibly flexible and can be adjusted to suit you and your students.

Emily DenBleyker (she/her) is a South Jersey-born, Seattle-based singer, actor, voice teacher, vocal coach, and graduate student. With a lifelong love for singing and over 20 years of performance experience in musical theatre and choral music, DenBleyker is passionate about music education and making singing accessible to all people, especially those who “can’t sing.” She holds a Bachelor of Arts (magna cum laude) in music and communication arts from Gordon College and is a current Master of Arts candidate in voice pedagogy with the Voice Study Centre/ University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She presented a Poster Paper for the NATS Conference in Knoxville in June 2024. When not singing or thinking about singing or writing about singing, she enjoys reading books about archaeology, knitting, watching baseball (go Phillies!), and petting every dog and cat that she can.

Feldenkrais, Fascia, and Biotensegrity

By Jeremy Ryan Mossman

This past spring I spent two weeks in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the first of eight live segments of the professional Feldenkrais training. This is a training I started in 2017, but for a variety of reasons was unable to complete, so though they offered to give me credit for the first year I opted to experience it again from the beginning — and I'm so glad I did.

The Feldenkrais method is a way of optimizing your body through lessons that consist of gentle repeated movements (often called Somatics), functionally updating the way your body moves, which enhances nervous system efficiency, facilitating a global reorganization of sorts. It's a challenge to encapsulate — for everyone! If you ask 10 Feldenkrais practitioners to explain what the Feldenkrais method is, you'll probably get 10 very different answers. It brings together movement, psychology, nonlinear and experiential pedagogies, complexity theory, and though they aren't exactly a direct part of the method (largely because the research and areas of scientific study weren't in existence when Dr. Feldenkrais was teaching his method), fascia function and biotensegrity are also very relevant.

The tensional framework is our connective tissue, fascia, which not only keeps our skeleton, muscles, and organs where they should be, but also allows for differential movement, giving our body structural support and movement potential.

Biotensegrity is a combination of three words: "bio" for biological, as this framework includes all living things from animals, to plants, viruses, slime molds, fungi, and everything else that is a living organism, and the rest of the word — tensegrity — is a portmanteau of tension and integrity, bio-tens-egrity.

Tensegrity is a concept with its origins in architecture and art. A tensegrity structure holds its shape through a combination of tension and compression — forces of push and pull — and is gravity independent, just like us. Most structures we see are compression structures — the energy goes straight down to the ground, but tensegrities can change their



Jeremy Ryan Mossman

orientation to gravity and not change shape or fall apart. Kenneth Snelson's "Needle Tower" that was until very recently on display in the National Mall in Washington, DC is a tensegrity structure made of metal rods and wire cables that extends 60 feet towards the sky, and the heavy parts of it seemingly float in midair since they don't touch, but through continuous tensioned cables they stay in their spatial relationship.

This is just like the skeleton — bones that don't actually touch and can be in any relationship to gravity without losing their integrity because of the way they are held in a

tensional framework. Though we have inherited ideas such as "the spine is like a stack of bricks" that suggest the skeleton is a compression structure, that notion is untrue and not very resonant to our experience of moving through the world. If it were true, we would have to be upright at all times!

The body's tensional framework is the connective tissue, fascia, which not only keeps our skeleton, muscles, and organs where they should be, but also allows for differential movement, giving our body structural support and movement potential. It has the tensile strength of stainless steel but is essentially a fluid or something that isn't a solid, liquid, or gas — it is soft matter, a relatively new field of scientific inquiry. Its behavioral continuum from compliant to stiff gives our body its tensional integrity.

What an interesting thing to reconcile - fascia as a tensional system and the intention to relax. Can we have both tension and relaxation at the same time? Is it possible that we have misunderstood the functional benefits of tension and that it is not at odds with lightness, mobility, or physical freedom?

Let's explore this through our senses.

- Sit comfortably.
- Imagine the weight of your head somewhere between 8-12 lbs.
- Place that weight on your top vertebrae. Really try to feel that weight on your first cervical vertebrae.
- Add the weight of your head and the top vertebrae to the second vertebrae.
- Keep imagining the weight of your bones on the bones below all the way down your spine to your pelvis.

How does it feel to feel the weight of your head on your neck, neck on your torso, and all of that on your pelvis? I doubt it is

Mossman explains that you can learn a lot playing with gummy worms.

comfortable. It's also unlikely that this aligns with the way you experience yourself from day to day.

- Now imagine there's space between each vertebrae.
- Don't force anything. Just imagine.
- Do you feel a little lighter? More agile? More ready to move?
- Now fill the space with goo. A fluid that's thicker than water and moves slower than water. More like honey, or partially set Jello.

How does *that* feel to your senses? Move around a little while maintaining this feeling. It may even feel better than usual!

You may have attended some of my workshops in the last few years that referenced being made of gummy worms. It's not totally untrue! Gelatin is made of collagen — and so is our fascia. You can learn a lot playing with gummy worms: when you pull on them forcefully and fast, they stiffen and resist, but if you pull on them softly and slowly, they can stretch quite far, but you have to be gentle and get gentler as they lengthen. You can also get a feel for the importance of hydration in healthy movement. A gummy worm you leave on the counter will get stiffer as it dehydrates and moves in a rigid way, but if you soak it in water for a bit, it will return to a more mobile state. This is a feature of non-Newtonian fluids, which respond to stress in nonlinear ways. A hard touch makes them harder, and a soft touch makes them softer.

You can prove this:

- Give your temporo-mandibular joint a massage.
- Really knead your fingers or knuckles into the muscles.
- Pay attention to your breath — are you holding it?
- Pay attention to your body — are you bracing?

Compare this to a touch softer than soft:

- Take your hands to the same area and gently move the skin around.
- Listen to how the tissue under the skin responds.
- Sense how your soft touch is contacting far more than just the skin level.

Which helped your jaw move easier?

It's pretty wacky. I highly recommend watching Jean Claude Guimberteau's 22-minute documentary, "Strolling Under the Skin," on YouTube. It shows some of the only footage of fascia in a living body and highlights an important reality — we are not like machines at all, despite our mainstream models.



It's a common misunderstanding that fascia is around our muscles, bones, and organs because in reality fascia is everywhere. It is the scaffolding for our anatomy (read: named body parts). David Lesondak, author of "Fascia: What it Is and Why It Matters," refers to it as our "soft skeleton." Fascia researcher Robert Schleip calls it "the body-wide fascial net," as it is one interconnected woven web that acts as a communication network within itself, and as an interface between the brain and the world outside the body as it is more highly innervated than skin or the eyes leading it to be considered a sixth sense; a sensory organ for perception both in, of, and around the body.

Fascia explains how we are interconnected into functional unification, disproving models of levers, pulleys, origins, and insertions. It also explains how a problem in our foot could lead to a problem in our voice.

If only Dr. Feldenkrais could have known all of this! Though I imagine he *did* know on many levels. At the very least, it was something he sensed. He knew the importance of a soft touch. He recognized the body as interconnected. The way Feldenkrais elegantly connected mind and matter takes the effort out of learning and allows one to learn from their experience rather than an instruction. It's nonlinear learning at its best. Some even refer to him as the first neuroplastician. There are two chapters devoted to his method in Norman Doidge's book, "The Brain's Way of Healing."

Though I'm technically repeating training I've already done, it is taught and sequenced so differently than last time. Priorities are different, the nurturing is different, and the highlighting of certain key principles is also different.

One of the priorities was fully resting and releasing between every attempt of repeated movements. It's interesting how such a simple idea is both "elusively obvious" (to quote Feldenkrais, himself) and also so powerful:

I move. I return. I scan my contact points with the ground. I say to myself, "Relax. Soften. Sink."

When I start again, it's a **fresh** start. It allows brand new experience that gets better and easier with each iteration. Like a soft reset.

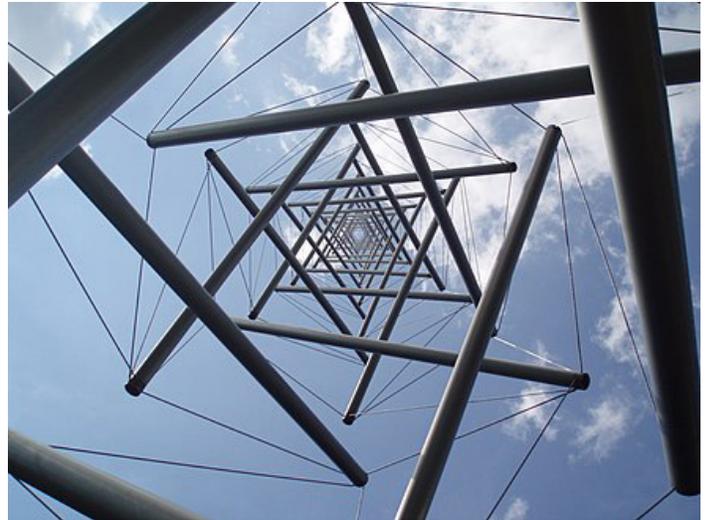
There's a lot of research on taking breaks in learning and how this helps our neurology consolidate each attempt into new skill potential. How the *time off* is as important as *time on*.

Going slower is a magnifying glass into what's going on and when. Imagining it first is going to prepare the pathway.

It also gives a little agency to that "in-between" place of doing and not doing. It gives that stage a deeper purpose. Metaphorical connective tissue. Focusing on the movement is like early anatomical inquiry where they considered muscles, bones, organs, and other named "parts" of the body to be "the important stuff," tossing away the in-between fascia, leaving it and its important roles in energy flow/force transmission, perception, and as the body's architectural support yet to be discovered.

Imagine applying this idea of a soft reset in the voice studio or singing practice.

- Sing a phrase to get a baseline for how things feel before doing anything else.
- Establish a baseline for relaxation as you encourage the soft tissues to melt.
- Prepare to sing a phrase. Don't start with the hard stuff or the "problem area." Start and stay where it's easy for a while.
- Really listen to the body as it moves from that softened place through inhalation into the impulse to vocalize. A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN THAT PROCESS.
- If anything abrupt happens, stop, relax, start again. Try slightly different tactics each time — going slower is a magnifying glass into what's going on and when. Imagining it first is going to prepare the pathway. Set the intention clearly. This is the seed that needs to grow deep roots.
- Let curiosity lead the way.
- When it's easy, sing some harder stuff. Watch for signs that learning has shifted from cognitive ("thinking about how") to autonomic.



Snelson Needle Tower tensegrity structure
Public artwork by American sculptor Kenneth Snelson, 1974

- Move on! Let that percolate and focus on artistry to see how the initial phrase has shifted. There may still be some glitches but was there improvement.
- Don't obsess about it being perfect. Better is enough.

Like my Feldenkrais teachers, I bring this up again — maybe not every session, but the more you can weave it in, even just a nod to the idea every so often, the more the seeds you planted will emerge on the surface. Imagine how it would be a great habit to have for long-term effortless singing. We might even consider this PREhab.

From Awareness Through Movement "each one of us speaks, moves, thinks, and feels in a different way, each according to the image of himself that [they have] built up over the years. In order to change the mode of action we must change the image of ourselves that we carry within us."

The next time you watch a high quality live vocal performance, notice how rarely the performers look relaxed. Notice how they're active and energetic in all parts of their body. But also notice the relative ease.

Jeremy Ryan Mossman (BM, MM, 500CYT) is a teacher of voice, movement, and wholistic expression. He has recently moved on from academic teaching after more than 15 years in order to focus on teaching in more creative and integrative ways while sharing his passion for wholly embodied singing. Knowledgeable in both biomechanics and biotensegrity, he has a unique way of reconciling long-held beliefs with new understandings about the body and teaching voice, which he teaches to other voice teachers in his program, Body Based Voice Ped. Learn more at bodybasedvoice.com.

Have you moved, changed your contact information, or your email?

Members: Now is a good time to update your information on [NATS.org](https://nats.org). Keeping your contact information up-to-date ensures that you won't miss any of our member benefits or upcoming events.



To make updates, log on to your Member Home Page (your email address for NATS correspondence is your Login). Then, click the "My Profile" link on the right.

You also can call the NATS National Office at 904-992-9101 for assistance.

IN MEMORIAM

March 2024 – September 2024

Ronald Thomas Combs

Christian Elser

Robert Gartside, Jr

Kerilyn Johnson

Janet Morrow King

Laurie Lewis-Fritz

Christopher Lovely

Rose Mary Owens

Rita Resch

Paul J. Sperry

Harriet Vogt

Kenneth Pennington

2025 Van L. Lawrence Fellowship

Application Deadline: Nov. 15, 2024

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 28th–June 1st, 2025, 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.



Foundation
Heritage Fund
of the NATS
Endowment



NATS CHAT

2024/25 SEASON

SUNDAYS 7-8 P.M. ET*

(6-7 P.M. CT; 5-6 P.M. MT; 4-5 P.M. PT)

**Unless otherwise noted*



NATS Chat invites guests to discuss various topics in an online webinar. Sessions are often held the second Sunday of each month of the academic year. The host and coordinator for NATS Chat is Kari Ragan. **The 2024/25 NATS Chat season is generously sponsored by Inside View Press**

OCTOBER 13, 2024

Title: Discovering Your Voice: Stretching Tips to Expand Your Range (and Mind)

Featuring Walt Fritz, PT

Host: Kari Ragan



This NATS Chat is dedicated to utilizing Walt Fritz's expertise of the impact of manual therapy on singers' stretching techniques. We will explore practical methods to integrate stretch and strength exercises that focus on the larynx and articulatory structures into our routine, helping to

unlock new vocal potential and maintain vocal health. We also will explore touch-based cueing; concerns and benefits. This session is ideal for singers, vocal coaches, and therapists eager to explore innovative approaches to vocal care and performance.

NOVEMBER 3, 2024

The Tax Landscape for Independent Voice Teachers

Featuring Elaine Grogan Luttrull, CPA-PFS, AFC®

Co-hosts: Kari Ragan and Ian Howell



In this NATS Chat, Elaine Grogan Luttrull will delve into the tax implications for Independent Voice Studio Teachers. The discussion will focus on critical topics such as identifying deductible expenses, maintaining accurate financial records, and understanding the nuances of decisions around becoming a sole proprietor, LLC, or S Corp. Her expertise will help demystify the complex tax landscape, offering practical advice to help voice teachers structure tax considerations more effectively.



DECEMBER 8, 2024

A Conversation with acclaimed composer and lyricist Adam Guettel

Featuring Adam Guettel

Host: Kari Ragan



Adam Guettel is an acclaimed American composer and lyricist known for his innovative contributions to musical theatre. The grandson of legendary composer Richard Rodgers, Guettel has carved out his own distinctive niche with works such as "The Light in the Piazza," which won six Tony Awards, including Best Original Score. His music is celebrated for its intricate melodies and sophisticated orchestration, blending classical and contemporary styles. Join us for an insightful conversation with the renowned Adam Guettel as we discuss the evolution of modern musical theatre, his experiences in the industry, and his valuable insights and guidance as a coach.

JANUARY 12, 2025

Brazilian and Portuguese Song: Repertoire, Pedagogy and Diction

Featuring Luciano Simões Silva and Juliana Franco

Co-hosts Carolina Botero and Kari Ragan



In this discussion, two singers and voice teachers with over 50 years of combined experience in performance, research, and education will explore vocal music from Brazil, Portugal, and beyond, encompassing both art and popular songs. Despite being the third most spoken European language globally, Portuguese-sung repertoire remains underrepresented in university curricula and concerts. The conversation will delve into the nuances of diction, the distinctions between Brazilian and European Portuguese, the extensive reach of the language across the world, and pedagogical methods for integrating this repertoire into both classical and popular music spheres, with a variety of examples from the repertoire and notable singers.



Register and view schedule at [NATS.org](https://www.nats.org).
Watch past chats on the [@OfficialNATS](https://www.youtube.com/@OfficialNATS)
YouTube channel.

A Reflection on Connection: A NATS visit to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London

By Christina R. Haldane

The NATS community fosters meaningful connections amongst voice professionals and students, through an ever evolving and expanding circle of curiosity, musical celebration, and lifelong learning. When reflecting upon the elements of these connections, what comes to mind? Enrichment: the synergy and excitement that comes from a journey of continued discovery, centered on excellence in teaching, performance, scholarship, and research creation. Spirit: the spontaneity, warmth, and expertise of our members. Voice: the celebration of each voice in this community, and how they contribute to this circle of connectivity.

In the summer of 2023, members of the NATS community embarked on a journey of connectivity through the NATS Transatlantic Pedagogy Trip to the UK (June 1–12), led by the then NATS President, Diana Allan. The trip brought together NATS members from across North America and the group visited some of the UK's top music schools, conservatories, and universities, and enjoyed meaningful knowledge exchange on vocal performance, teaching, and scholarship. One of the highlights of the trip was a visit to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, an internationally renowned higher education community nestled in the heart of the City of London, that is consistently ranked as one of world's top institutions for studying Music, Drama, and the Performing Arts.

This was an exciting opportunity for NATS members to build connections with the Guildhall and learn from this vibrant world-class arts community. For myself, this was an especially important moment, as it was also a return to my alma mater, as I graduated with a master's degree in voice performance from the Guildhall in 2005.

Training at the Guildhall was a dream of mine since my earliest voice studies, as a teenager at the Victoria Conservatory of Music in Victoria, British Columbia, in Canada. My days



Christina R. Haldane

at the Guildhall were spent joyfully exploring my voice and artistry, and at the same time, building meaningful relationships with my then student colleagues and with leading music industry professionals, all against the backdrop of London's brilliant arts and culture scene. It was these student connections that nurtured this NATS visit, as current Guildhall Vice-Principal and Director of Music Armin Zanner was on the same program of study as I, and current Deputy Head of Vocal Studies Samantha Malk was a colleague of mine from my time as a freelance professional singer in London, post Guildhall training. At the same time, Samantha was also a past voice student of then NATS Past President Karen Brunssen's, from Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music in Evanston, Illinois, enhancing the circles of connectivity amongst us. I was excited to see how the Guildhall had evolved since my time as a student, and the NATS "trippers" were eager to build bridges with this rich community. We were grateful to Armin Zanner and Samantha Malk for hosting us for this special connection event.



NATS "trippers" at the Guildhall entrance on Silk Street

When the NATS “trippers” stepped into the Guildhall world for our visit; we were enriched by the excellence of the teaching and performing, welcomed with a spirit of warmth, spontaneity, and openness, and excited to celebrate the “voices” we met along the way. Upon entering the Guildhall foyer, we landed straight into the hustle and bustle of a regular day at the school: students excitedly conversing, the musical energy of student recitals happening in the adjacent hall, and instructors and staff milling about in the middle of it all. Our host Samantha Malk took us on a tour of all the impressive and cutting-edge learning, teaching, and performance spaces, but not before we were spontaneously greeted in the foyer by the school’s Principal, Professor Jonathan Vaughan.

Activities for the day were centred on a spirit of lifelong learning, celebration of voice, and nourishing connectivity. The group enjoyed valuable knowledge exchange through a series of mini-presentations given by NATS members Cynthia Vaughn, Debbie Dalton, Deirdre Welborn, and I, that explored a range of topics, from breath management “quick tips,” voice pedagogy for instrumentalists, incorporating play in the voice studio, and Acadian folk songs and the oral tradition. These meaningful presentations enabled us to continue our journey of lifelong learning within the Guildhall community.

We were then invited to celebrate Guildhall voices by attending an end of year vocal recital, performed by talented 4th year BMus singer Zoë Jackson, a student of Janice Chapman and Marcus van den Akker. Zoë was joined by her collaborative pianist, Mike Pugh, and presented a beautifully fresh program of Western art songs and opera, featuring works by Walton, Duparc, Massenet, Noble, Verdi, Strauss, and Mahler. The performance culminated in an engaging rendition of “A Word on my Ear” (I’m tone deaf!) by Flanders and Swan.

Our visit concluded with an open roundtable discussion between NATS members, our hosts Samantha Malk and Armin Zanner, and voice teachers from the Guildhall and Royal College of Music communities. This was a meaningful opportunity to connect with and learn from our UK colleagues. The discussion was open, warm, and full of shared insights and experiences. We organically explored a variety of topics that included broadening the singer skillset



Based in the heart of London, the Guildhall School of Music & Drama is next door to the Barbican Centre, the largest multi-arts center of its kind in Europe.

and curriculum building, adapting to industry changes, assessment parameters, diversifying repertoire, financial structures, and preparing singers for their next steps as music professionals.

The Guildhall School of Music and Drama is a vibrant, international community of musicians, actors and production artists studying, training and performing together in the heart of the City of London. Here’s more from the Guildhall team:

Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Ranked number one in Arts, Drama and Music by the Complete University Guide 2024, one of the top five institutions in the world for Music and the Performing Arts in the QS World University Rankings 2024, as well as number one higher education institution in the Guardian University Guide music league table, we deliver world-class professional training in partnership with distinguished artists, companies and ensembles. A global leader in creative and professional practice, we promote innovation, experiment and research and are also one of the UK’s leading providers of lifelong learning in the performing arts, offering inspiring training for children, young people, adult learners and creative and business professionals.

Vocal Studies

Guildhall School is internationally renowned for its training of singers. At the heart of our approach in Vocal Studies is the development of each student’s individuality as a performer and artist. Through an intensive programme of one-to-one lessons, specialist coaching, small-group work, repertoire



Armin Zanner, Christina Haldane



Karen Brunssen, Samantha Malk, Diana Allan, Jonathan Vaughan, Christina Haldane, and Allen Henderson

classes and performance projects, you will gain the knowledge and practical experience necessary to forge your own artistic path. The training emphasises Western classical music and opera, and a passion for these art forms is necessary, while we also encourage you to extend the conventional scope of these areas in line with your interests and professional ambitions. Learn more at gsmd.ac.uk

FUN FACTS about our Guildhall visit:

Artistry is everywhere; we were treated to a spontaneous delivery of monologues by two drama students who were rehearsing in the space prior to our roundtable discussion.

- Hospitality; thank you for such a magnificent array of snacks during our visit, we especially appreciated all the cookies we brought back to our tour bus for the ride home!
- Energy; there is excitement and musical hustle bustle around every corner of these learning spaces.
- Play; even taking the elevators is an adventure, as there was a discovery every time the doors opened.
- Warmth; our hosts and the community welcomed us with a spirit of openness.
- When NATS “trippers” were polled on how they would describe the Guildhall, the most prominent descriptor was: excellence.

The essence of enrichment, spirit, and voice is intertwined within the Guildhall and NATS communities. It is this essence that strengthens our actions and broadens our circle of connectivity.

Dr. Christina Raphaëlle Haldane (she/ her), soprano has an international career as an opera singer, orchestral soloist,



Mini-presenters: Cynthia Vaughn, Christina Haldane, Dierde “Deedy” Welborn, Debbie Dalton

recitalist, and chamber musician. Her specialisms include Handel's heroines, comedic bel canto, and contemporary music collaborations with living composers. She is a critically acclaimed recording artist whose work fuses Western art music with other styles, such as folk, jazz, and the avant-garde. Haldane's performance experience informs her pedagogy, which is grounded on equity, empathy, collaboration, voice research and science, and student-centered goals.

Haldane joined Mount Allison University in 2022, as an assistant professor in voice at the department of music. Her ethos of collaboration and connectivity leads her to foster meaningful relationships with students, faculty, community partners, and music industry professionals, to enable an affirming voice community at MtA to thrive. She has an international profile as a leader, clinician, and adjudicator and is grateful for her path as a lifelong learner, scholar, and teaching artist. Haldane is based in Canada's Atlantic provinces, where she lives with her partner Patrice and their two diva-dog Pomeranians, Wally and Sissi.

Art Song!

COMPOSITION
AWARD



National Association of Teachers of Singing



ADVANCING QUALITY
VOCAL LITERATURE
BY PROMOTING NEW
WORKS FOR SINGERS

REQUIREMENTS - The work must be:

- (1) a song cycle, group of songs, or extended song between 13 and 25 minutes in length. Genres other than the classical "art song" are discouraged.
- (2) composed for single voice and single acoustic instrument (solo instruments other than piano as the collaborative instrument will be accepted).
- (3) English (or English translation), either in the public domain* or for which the composer has secured appropriate permission.
- (4) composed within the past 2 years (after January 1, 2023).

ENTRY FEE - \$30 for professionals; \$15 for full-time students each entry (payable in U.S. funds to NATS).

ENTRY DATES - June 1, 2024 through December 1, 2024.

ELIGIBILITY - Open to anyone meeting prescribed requirements.

PROCEDURE - All applications must be submitted electronically via www.nats.org. Please read the complete details posted on the NATS website. The following are required materials for entry:

- (1) A PDF copy of the song score(s). Copies must be legible and should include composition title; poet's (or poets') name(s); public domain status or information regarding permission; length and date of composition. **THE COMPOSER'S NAME MUST NOT APPEAR ANYWHERE ON THE SCORE.**
- (2) Digital audio file(s) of the composition(s).
- (3) Recordings must be of the highest quality possible (performance or working).
- (4) The title of the composition should be the only labeling on the recording(s).
- (5) The song order on the recordings must match the song order of the scores.

1ST PLACE

\$2,000

PLUS the composer's expenses to the NATS 59th National Conference in 2026, where the performance of the winning composition will be given.

2ND PLACE

\$1,000

Cash prizes generously sponsored
by composer Lori Laitman

NATS reserves a non-exclusive right to sponsor performances of the winning work for two years without additional remuneration to the composer.

** For U.S. publications, a summary of works in the public domain is available on NATS.org.*

ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY DECEMBER 1, 2024
APPLY ONLINE AND VIEW COMPLETE DETAILS AT NATS.ORG

Coming Full Circle: 21 Years Later, A New Perspective

By Kelly Balmaceda, NATS Director of Events and Programs

As I stood in the back of the room, swaying to the sounds of Sage and Prairie Wildfire (the phenomenal bluegrass band from ETSU), I thought to myself, “This is NOT the NATS I grew up with...” I can remember my very first NATS student audition; 19 years old, an undergrad at NEC, performing Beach, Handel, and Enescu. I advanced to the finals, was encouraged by the adjudicators’ feedback, and was proud to represent my studio and school. Despite it being a successful first NATS outing, what I remember most was feeling insecure and a little inferior. I idolized the teachers, the beautiful divas with their fashionable scarves and perfectly applied makeup. I wanted to be them one day. Not only that, but I secretly LOVED musical theater and as a voice major at NEC that made me “less serious” than my opera loving peers. *Fast forward 21 years....* professional CLASSICAL soprano, voice instructor (both in academia and independent/multi-teacher studio owner — teaching classical and musical theater), and one year into my role as the Director of Events and Programs with NATS. I’ve come full circle. However, I still get butterflies when I attend a NATS event ... even one that I have coordinated. I’m inspired by the research and pedagogy, encouraged and motivated by the next generation of NATS leaders and fellow teachers, and I’m often flabbergasted when I realize these amazing individuals are my peers. I’m no longer the 19-year-old soprano desperately hoping the adjudicators choose me... I’m now sitting at the table planning and dreaming with the best and brightest in our industry. How lucky am I? And what a time to be part of this association! Our membership is changing, and not just the names of membership categories. Our demographic is changing. We are no longer an association of primarily classical academic professors. We are a vibrant and diverse association with members specializing in all styles and genres of singing with over 50% working outside of academia. This means our programming needs to reflect the membership and our members’ varied interests.

This past conference was quite possibly the most diverse programming NATS has ever seen. It was exciting and innovative! As I look to the future, it is my hope to partner with leaders at all levels of our organization to better support our teachers’ needs and interests. The recent conference survey provided some insight as to the top reasons members attend events:



Kelly Balmaceda

1. Professional/Educational Development
2. Networking
3. Opportunity to present research

We will use this information to guide how we plan for the future. Are you someone looking for professional/educational development? Then you need to check out all the NATS Mentoring Initiatives. Emerging teachers should explore and apply to be part of the incredible Intern Program. Who wouldn't benefit from a 10-day intensive, with world renowned master teachers (of all genres and disciplines) practically for FREE?! Join us in

January, as we partner with NOA (National Opera Association) for four days in beautiful Savannah, delving into opera, musical theatre, pedagogy, music festivals, and more! Get your passport ready to head to Toronto (summer 2025) as we unite with voice teachers and organizations around the world for the 11th International Congress of Voice Teachers. Learn and grow with the world's leading voices of our industry.

Maybe your priority is networking and building relationships with other voice professionals. Again, I say check out NATS' mentoring programs, join one of the many Affinity Groups and get to know your peers around the world. Come to our in-person events to mix and mingle with other passionate educators and performing artists. All future events will maximize time for socializing and networking, as this is not only a priority for our members, but necessary as we strive to build community in our association.

Lastly, are you one of the brilliant minds in our association, eager to share your research and expertise? We are doing our best to expand the opportunity for more voices to be heard, especially underrepresented and diverse voices. We are programming over 90 hours of breakout sessions, in addition to numerous poster presentations for the upcoming ICVT. Stay tuned to submit your own proposals for future conferences and workshops.

I can't tell you the number of people who commented on the “positive and energetic vibe” at this summer's conference. I couldn't agree more. I hope to continue to build on this joy and positivity, as well as foster an inclusive and diverse space for all our members to shine. I look forward to seeing you at a future event!

Membership Ever Evolving

October 1 is once again the beginning of NATS renewal period, and when you log in to your NATS profile to pay your dues, the membership names are different. In June, the board approved changes to the bylaws and in July, Executive Director Allen Henderson emailed those membership types and asked you to vote on the changes. They passed and will go into effect this October.



The changes reflect our goals to be more inclusive for our members and to better meet their needs. There is nothing you must do. When you log in to pay your dues, we will have already changed your membership type.

If you were a Full Member, you are now going to be a Professional Member. Professional members are individuals with training and experience in teaching singing, collaborative pianists, or other voice professionals. Member benefits will remain the same. You will still have access to professional development and networking, webinars and trusted resources, national competitions and student auditions, access to insurance and other members only discounts, and digital access to the *Journal of Singing*. You can enter your students into competitions, adjudicate competitions, hold an office at chapter or national level, and be listed in the Find-A-Teacher database. We are expanding

the database to better represent our membership by allowing you to list your services in multiple locations and to offer not only singing lessons but also to allow our pianists to find students. Professional membership will

be \$129. If you wish to receive a printed version of the *Journal of Singing* that option will be available to you for a \$40 fee.

If you were an Affiliate Member, you will still be an Affiliate. This membership is for our composers, schools, colleges or universities, and other industries related to singing. You cannot be listed in the Find-A-Teacher database, enter anyone into the student auditions or adjudicate at an audition, but all the other benefits are available to this membership type, including networking, access to members only benefits like insurance, and the digital *Journal of Singing*. Affiliate membership dues are \$129.

If you were a Student Member, you will become a Pre-Professional Member. This is for students in secondary, undergraduate, or graduate school studying to be teachers of singing, collaborative artists, and voice professionals. You will have access to professional development, discounts on conference fees, and the digital *Journal of Singing*. You will not be able to list yourself in the Find-A-Teacher database, enter a student into the student auditions, or adjudicate

Give the Gift of NATS



NATS is the perfect gift for anyone interested in teaching singing. If you would like to help another teacher discover NATS, you can give them a membership. If they are currently a member, the gift will pay for their renewal for the 2025 year. If they are not currently a member, your gift will allow them to join NATS as a Professional (\$129), our new Emerging Professional (\$90), or Pre-Professional (\$25). All you will need is their name, city and state, and email address.

To purchase a Gift Membership, visit [our website](#) and scroll to "[Gift Membership](#)."

Renewal starts October 1

Dues for 2025

- Professional: \$129
- Affiliate: \$129
- Emerging Professional: \$90
- Pre-Professional \$25
- Joint \$80
- Emeritus: no dues but must rejoin chapter by January 1, 2025.

Easiest way to pay: online at NATS.org. Login: your email and your password.

US Checks/Money Orders mail to 9957 Moorings Drive, Suite 401, Jacksonville FL 32257.

Need assistance?

Email membership@nats.org

a competition. You can enter a student audition yourself provided your teacher is a member of NATS and enters you. More good news for our Pre-Professional members, your dues will be going down from \$46 to just \$25.

Emeritus Members do not have to renew their national membership with NATS. You remain active with NATS and can continue to receive the digital *Journal of Singing*, hold an office, attend conferences for discounted fees, be listed in the Find-A-Teacher database, participate in student auditions, and adjudicate student auditions. However, you need to renew your chapter annually to remain on the chapter membership roster. Emeritus members are those members who have been with NATS for 20 continuous years or 25 non-continuous years and are at least 68 years of age. If you would like to be considered for emeritus membership and meet these criteria, send an email to membership@nats.org to request it.

An invoice with your national dues and any chapter dues you selected in the past year will be mailed to you. It will include instructions on how to go online and renew immediately or how to mail in your payment. Remember if you choose to mail in your dues, checks or money orders must be in U.S. dollars. Your membership will not indicate that it is paid for the upcoming year until the payment has been received and posted to your account.

The fastest and easiest way to renew is online at NATS.org. You will need the email address you used to set up your NATS membership and the password you chose to login. Once you login, it will say "Welcome" and your name. Click on the button that says "Renew Now," which takes you through the entire renewal process, and gives you the option to change or add chapters. Once you get to the billing information for your credit card, there is an option to assist NATS in recovering the service fees we incur for credit card payment. If you do not mind helping, select "yes" when asked if will you pay the 3% service fees. If you do not wish to pay this additional cost, click the "NO" option. This will remove that cost, but you may still complete your credit card transaction.

Some members will qualify for the tiered pricing based on their country. This is automatically applied when the credit card is processed based on the country listed in the billing section.

If you need any assistance or have any questions regarding renewing your membership, please reach out to membership@nats.org or call 904-992-9101, ext. 400, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

2023 Fiscal Year Audit Summary

The 2023 audit of the National Association of Teachers of Singing has been completed and published copies of the report were furnished to members of the Board of Directors by the independent auditing firm of MST, LLC., Certified Public Accountants, Brunswick, GA. The entire unqualified report and opinion letter of the auditor is available for members to review in the Executive Office of NATS in Jacksonville, Florida, as well as from members of the Board of Directors. The following summary of the details of the audit are extracted and summarized below. The auditor's report and the notes that accompanied the report are an integral part of the audit statements.

Comparative Statement of Financial Position

Years Ended December 31, 2023, and December 31, 2022

Assets	Dec 31, 2023	Dec 31, 2022
Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	545,019	830,490
Restricted Cash	52,706	0
Accounts Receivable	6,688	11,165
Prepaid Expenses	59,659	33,344
Investments, at fair value	1,231,621	1,089,704
Software in development	98,360	0
Property and equipment, net	196,654	208,429
Publication Inventory	0	15,000
Other Assets	0	773
Total Assets	\$2,190,707	\$2,188,905

Liabilities and Net Assets	Dec 31, 2023	Dec 31, 2022
Liabilities		
Accounts Payable	60,419	61,287
Accrued expenses	10,279	0
Advances held for ICVT	15,426	15,426
Chapter dues payable	49,618	
Donations held for chapters and regions	93,502	
Deferred revenue	291,186	334,755
Notes Payable	100,100	104,128
Current Portion of Long-term Debt	0	2,236
Total Liabilities	620,530	517,832
Net Assets		
Net assets without donor restrictions	811,326	856,427
Net assets with donor restrictions	758,851	814,646
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	2,190,707	2,188,905

ROWMAN &
LITTLEFIELD



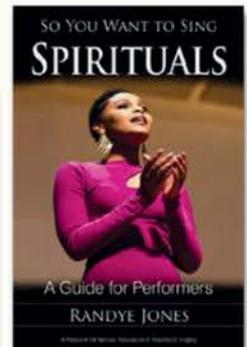
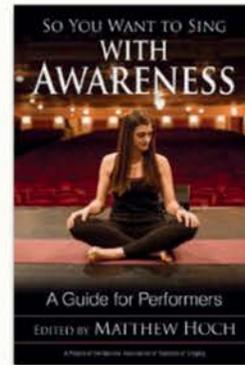
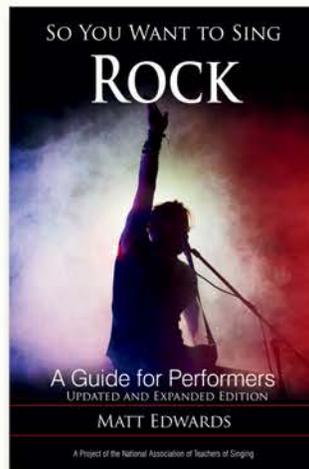
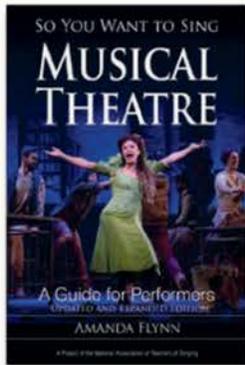
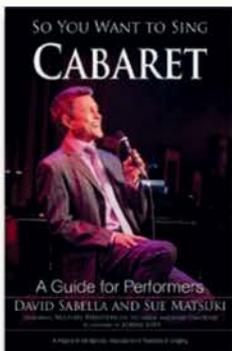
SO YOU WANT TO SING

Guides for Performers and Professionals

Executive Editor: Allen Henderson

Series Editor: Matthew Hoch

So You Want to Sing is a series of invaluable books devoted to providing a complete survey of what it means to sing within a particular style. Each contribution functions as a touchstone work for not only professional singers but also students and teachers of singing. All books in the series feature online supplemental material on www.nats.org.



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Sing Rock 'n' Roll.*

'Music is Who I Am'

A conversation with independent studio teacher and performer, Leslie M. Holmes

By Jen Jimenez, NATS Development Director

With 7,000 members, it would be difficult to imagine that one voice teacher could be known to such a large conglomerate of colleagues. However, when the name Leslie Holmes is mentioned, genuine smiles appear across the faces of many in the NATS community.

A former NATS Foundation Board member and New England Region Governor, Leslie has always made NATS a priority — contributing her knowledge, time, talents, and treasures to the NATS organization for over four decades. Many members may have met her at various conferences, workshops, regional meetings, or auditions. But most know her as the inquisitive interviewer and creator of "The Vocal Point" column in the NATS *Journal of Singing*. As author of the column for 22 years, she strategically researched her potential subjects and successfully found ways to reach them to conduct fascinating interviews.

"I wanted to know who was behind the person onstage," Holmes said.

But who is the person behind the paper and pen? Holmes' penchant for music began at an early age, taking piano lessons at the age of four. As she grew older, voice, ballet, art, and trumpet lessons were added to her weekly schedule of study. In fact, she and her three siblings were all involved in music lessons; each required to practice their instrument a half hour before school every day by their mother, a church organist. Although her parents made sure she honed her musical skills, it was her grandmother who had a profound influence on her studies — particularly piano and voice.

"I spent a month with her every other summer," Holmes shared. "I think I kept singing because it meant so much to her."

A contralto who was offered a contract to sing with the MET, Leslie's grandmother was an "amazing pianist" and directed the Blackburn College Choir. A beautiful painting of her grandmother sitting at her piano hangs in Leslie's

living room, adjacent to her own piano and a vast library of music scores.

Although offered positions to teach at various schools, Holmes chose to teach independently, keeping a busy studio

of voice students while giving masterclasses, workshops, and cabarets at various venues including at NATS national conferences and workshops.

"Teaching independently gave me flexibility," she explained. "I am a great believer that the high notes have greater depth than the low notes. I'm very big on communicating to whomever you are performing for. My students have learned to express themselves."

In addition to her studio, Holmes has kept a rich performance schedule as a soloist with prestigious symphonies such as Boston Pops, Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Wellesley Symphony.

Her beautiful soprano voice also

was heard as a soloist on National Public Radio and with the Chorus Pro Musica and Wellesley Choral Society, to name a few. She has performed solo recitals for various Conservatories and organizations across the United States, Europe, and Cuba.

Currently, Holmes is still effortlessly tickling the ivories and teaching voice lessons to students, including a student who is 93 years young! Continuing to be active in the NATS community, "NATS has come a long way in recognizing independent teachers," she said.

A voice teacher, performer, musician, and mother, Holmes truly epitomizes the versatility, talents, and humor of an independent studio teacher. When asked how she managed teaching while raising three boys, she simply replied, "One of my sons said, 'How many kids can go to sleep with their mom singing opera in the bathroom?'" Her career has truly been one for the books and according to Leslie, a book that would be titled, "Music is Who I Am."



Leslie M. Holmes



80th Anniversary Fund

Supporting National
Student Auditions in Honor of:



Carole Blankenship



Karen Brunssen



Dan Johnson-Wilmot

Lift Your Voices in Support of NATS Day of Giving!

By Jen Jimenez, NATS Development Director

Every year, nonprofit organizations around the globe choose one day on the calendar for a concerted effort to raise philanthropic support for an important cause. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, NATS has continually joined this effort; successfully fundraising for various integral initiatives such as the “Keep Our Students Singing” campaign in 2023, which garnered support for national, regional, and chapter Vocal Arts Scholarships.

This year, we invite you to join us for the **2024 Lift Your Voices Day of Giving** in support of NATS 80th Anniversary Fund, which will take place on Tuesday, November 19, 2024. We have chosen a standalone date, rather than the National Day of Giving date, in the hopes of providing an optimal opportunity for as many members, students, family, friends, and patrons of vocal music to become involved as possible. To this end, our goal for the 2024 *Lift Your Voices* Day of Giving is one of participation rather than dollar amount: **80 donors in 24 hours in honor of 80 years of singing, teaching, and voice research!**

NATS 80th Anniversary Fund will support the NATS National Student Auditions which offer accelerated learning opportunities through the largest series of student voice auditions in the world! In celebration of our 80th anniversary, NATS is honoring three extraordinary volunteers for their

significant contributions to the advancement of singing and voice education: Karen Brunssen, Carole Blankenship, and Dan Johnson-Wilmot. Your gift on the *Lift Your Voices* Day of Giving will support the naming of three prizes at the National Student Auditions in honor of our esteemed colleagues.

Our exciting Day of Giving will begin at midnight on November 19 with the launch of NATS first-ever interactive Day of Giving website! On this site, you will not only have the opportunity to easily make your gift but share a call-to-action across your social media channels, issue giving challenges to colleagues, students, family, and friends, participate in region/chapter competitions to win NATS merchandise, and create video testimonials — all in real time while viewing our live goal meter!

I invite you to save the date for this important day as we continue to serve students who annually participate in the NATS National Student Auditions. Please check your inboxes over the next few months for additional information from your Regional Development Liaisons and me regarding the 2024 *Lift Your Voices* Day of Giving. If you have questions or would like more information on how you can become an advocate for our *Lift Your Voices* Day of Giving, please contact me at jen@nats.org or (904) 586-3395.

Encore! SOCIETY

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NATS has been an important part of my life. I'm happy to know my gift will help transform lives for years to come.

— DIANA ALLAN, FOUNDING
ENCORE! SOCIETY MEMBER



**You don't have to be wealthy
to leave a gift that will resound for generations.**

Have you considered leaving a gift to NATS in your will or trust?

For many individuals, the bulk of our wealth is held in our estate – our retirement plan, property, life insurance, etc. This means that legacy giving might be the most impactful gift we will ever make.

How would you impact NATS? You could create a named scholarship for future NATS students or name a NATSAA or NMTC prize. You could advance the careers of young vocal teachers. You might provide permanent funding for the program you value most. Making a legacy gift to NATS advances our art in a lasting way.

A legacy gift to NATS makes you a member of the **Encore! Society**, created to recognize donors who have made a long-term commitment to NATS' mission through estate gifts.

Encore! Society member benefits:

- Knowing your values will be carried forward by NATS
- Name recognition, with permission, in the NATS annual reports and on the NATS website
- The opportunity to name a scholarship or prize
- Invitations to NATS President's Reception at the National Conference
- Updates on NATS programs and activities

Changing lives through the power of singing through:

- Gifts In Your WILL OR TRUST
- A Gift of a LIFE INSURANCE POLICY
- Designate NATS as a beneficiary of BANK AND BROKERAGE ACCOUNTS
- LIFE INCOME PLANS

If you would like to discuss a charitable bequest, please contact NATS at 904-992-9101 or email donations@nats.org.