

To Understand, Value, Uphold, and Advance

Lynn Holding



Lynn Holding

The new editor in chief of the *Journal of Singing* (JOS) writes her inaugural “Editor’s Commentary” column for the first issue under her editorship. It begins with a meditation upon the three actions that inspire the new editor in chief—to understand, value and uphold—as they relate to both the past and future of the journal, and the need for the fourth action, to advance, in order to bring the journal in line with twenty-first century publication practices. It also includes recognition of retiring and departing *Journal of Singing* contributors, as well as announcements about new peer reviewers who have been added to the journal’s editorial board, several new journal columns and their associate editors, and two initiatives of the new editor in chief: the “Mentored Writing Initiative” and the “Richard Sjoerdsma Excellence in Writing Award.”

GREETINGS, *JOURNAL OF SINGING* READERS! As a longtime reader and contributor to this journal, it is with a mixture of gratitude and enthusiasm that I assume the helm of the *Journal of Singing* as its newest editor in chief. I am honored that the members of last summer’s search committee for a new editor in chief placed their trust in me to lead our venerable journal forward into the twenty-first century; and since change is inherent in any new venture, I am enthusiastic about the many new people, columns, and initiatives that will be introduced in this and future issues of the *Journal of Singing*.

What began as simply *The Bulletin* in 1944, changed to *The NATS Bulletin* (1966–1985), morphed to *The NATS Journal* (1985–1995), and finally dubbed itself plainly *The Journal of Singing* in 1995, has been led by an equally varied list of editors in chief over these past seventy-nine years, who served terms ranging from a few years to longer terms of service. Yet the twenty-two-year term of editor in chief emeritus Richard Sjoerdsma is one of the longest. Dick (as he is known to friends) transformed our journal from its once rather parochial view to a journal worthy of NATS’ self-description as “the largest professional association of teachers of singing in the world.”¹ As Dick himself noted in his interview with NATS earlier this spring, “I was able to bring the *Journal of Singing* to a new level of sophistication and relevance.”² I heartily agree. Thus, I feel that my overarching charge as the journal’s newest editor in chief is to understand, value and uphold the high standards that Dick attained for the *Journal of Singing*, while at the very same time, advance the journal’s mission by first bringing it in line with the changed (end ever changing) standards in academic publishing in the twenty-first century. To begin this work, one must first understand where JOS currently stands and how far it has come, from not only the period when Dick took over in 2001, but where it stood in the previous century—for example, when I joined NATS in 1988,

Journal of Singing, September/October 2023
Volume 80, No. 1, pp. 7–11
<https://doi.org/10.53830/AEIF1790>
Copyright © 2023
National Association of Teachers of Singing

which was practically my first act after my university graduation. As Dick himself described it, JOS at that time was “essentially a magazine.”

When I began my editorship, the title was, in fact, *Journal of Singing*, but the very cover belied that claim. The magazine contents were listed on the cover, and its appearance resembled that of the *Reader's Digest*. Sometimes printing errors appeared on the cover itself, which was not exactly positive advertising. In one issue, in fact, I found three different spellings of “Winterreise”! As a result, I felt that the journal was not taken as seriously as I wished it to be.³

That “magazine” grew into the “respected scholarly journal” that it is today largely thanks to Dick’s efforts.⁴ It must also be noted that in the realm of printed matter, the visual representation of scholarly content is arguably as important as the articles that appear inside our journal. In this regard, kudos must go to both Dick and our journal production manager Laura Carter (owner of Carter Publishing Studio) who, along with Dick, “re-designed the entire publication. . . . we opted for the clean look we still have today, and Laura modernized the fonts and page design, resulting in the current sophisticated and professional appearance.”⁵

In both form and content, JOS truly is “the premier peer-reviewed journal exclusively dedicated to the art of singing and the teaching profession,” as was claimed by the NATS subcommittee dedicated to begin the process of moving JOS to an all-digital production process.⁶ While we must continually strive to both retain and deserve this description, we must also endeavor to catch up with the new digital standards in academic publishing. To that specific end, I have been working closely with Laura Carter since last fall as the transition editor elect, and our work continues on many levels, from the laborious aspects of digitizing almost every aspect of the journal’s production, to confronting the deeper philosophical and ethical issues surrounding the glut of information that characterizes life in the twenty-first century.

The Journal of Singing in the Digital Age

I am a “digital immigrant,” defined as those people “who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in [their] lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology.”⁷ In my new role as editor in chief, I feel the experience of having been born just before the rise of the information

age, yet having grown up alongside its increasing influence on society affords me an advantageous perspective, allowing me to see both the positive and negative effects on society wrought by the advent of digital tools. On the downside, many people feel that the constant flood of information has eroded the entwined attributes of erudition and expertise—we are all experts now!—amplifying an all too human tendency to relativize and reduce just about all human endeavor to this sentiment (as the bored Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus* sings): “Chacun a son gout!” His utterance is usually defined as “each to one’s own taste,” or “do as you like;” but in a jaded era, it could also be understood as “whatever.”

Yet an equal number of voices (particularly those dubbed “Digital Natives”) cite the many advantages to having breached the ramparts and taken on the “gatekeepers of knowledge who exercised their expert power,” an infiltration made possible by the invention of the world wide web in the previous century.^{8,9} It is important to understand how the torrent of free information in the current digital age has operated as both blessing and curse to society as a whole. On the upside, the digital age dissolved what social psychologists call the “gatekeepers of the knowledge economy;” this, in turn, allowed many previously unheard voices to be heard and amplified. Indeed, it was both unfettered access and connection via social media that sparked and nurtured the most recent social movements in the United States, such as the Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements. Unfortunately, that same unfettered access has also allowed unfiltered information into the communication ecosystem and with it, the proliferation of “alternative facts” (courtesy of former presidential advisor Kellyanne Conway) and conspiracy theories.¹⁰ In a world in which everyone is an equal expert, then no one really is; in such a world, expertise itself is in danger of being denigrated as just another sham. This picture has become even bleaker with the rise of AI and ChatGPT, two recent juggernauts of the information age that all of us as humans will have to assess, and with which all of us as singers, teachers, NATS members and JOS readers will have to contend. We face historic and monumental decisions about who creates the content we consume.

This multifaced charge—to understand, value and hew to the high standards that Richard Sjoerdsma attained for JOS, yet align with the new and fluid aca-

demographic publishing parameters of the twenty-first century and advance the journal's mission— is an immense one. I am honored to take on the challenge.

The JOS Transition Period

As previously mentioned, in October of last year, I was appointed editor in chief elect in order to work behind the scenes to refine the journal's transition to the all-digital workflow begun the previous year. I would like to thank several people for their help during this necessary and critical process; first, to current NATS president Diana Allan for hearing my entreaties about the necessity of this "transition phase," and to NATS Executive Director Allen Henderson for crafting a "delineation of duties" and a title for this critical juncture for JOS. As I was laboring behind the scenes, Dick Sjoerdsma was deftly seeing to his last volume (number 79) as well as patiently answering my many email questions about current JOS obligations and personnel. He always found time to include a *bon mot* or two for my amusement, small acts that added sparkles of merriment during the drudgery. Danke! In his last "editor's commentary, Dick thanked the retiring and outgoing contributors (Robert Edwin, Ingo Titze, Leslie Holmes, Margo Garrett, Leslie de'Ath, and Heidi Moss Erickson) and I would like to recognize their contributions as well as their part in building the excellence of the *Journal of Singing*.

Before introducing our readers to the newest members of our journal's editorial board, I want to thank the board's longest serving members: Stephen Austin, Kenneth Bozeman, Debra Greschner, Judith Nicosia, John Nix, Elvia Puccinelli and Trineice Robinson-Martin. These peer-reviewers have gamely retired the old assessment systems, created their new ScholarOne (S1) accounts and learned to wield S1's awesome new commenting features while at the same time, weathering the digital annoyances of its robo-reminders and tiny tech failures. Finally, I wish all JOS readers to be aware that this transition would have been virtually impossible without the outsize efforts of our journal production manager, the brilliant Laura Carter, who has devoted untold hours to both the S1 onboarding process as well as training me in the many digital tools that are needed to run an academic journal in the twenty-first century. I cannot imagine a more knowledgeable or dedicated navigator of this JOS transition phase. Thank you.

New JOS Columns and Writers

It is my pleasure to introduce the following new writers for the journal, all of whom carry the title "associate editor;" readers should also note the introduction of associate editor *teams*; it is my hope that two persons instead of one might not only share the workload, but also complement each other's profiles and in so doing, inspire one another via inquiry and investigation. Another change I have made is the transformation of *The Vocal Point* column from a print-only to a hybrid print-plus-video format. New associate editor Melissa Treinkman will continue the "Vocal Point" tradition (begun by Leslie Holmes) of interviewing professional singers, yet will take JOS in a new direction by inaugurating the journal's first hybrid column. Treinkman's interviews will be video-recorded and posted on the NATS YouTube channel, along with a written column about the interviewees and their roles in the world of singing. In the words of Treinkman, "The addition of the video interview to the existing written format serves to expand the audience for the *Journal of Singing*, allows NATS members to hear artists speak in their own voices, and creates a unique historic record of the artists of our time."¹¹ Treinkman will continue to interview classical singers as well as reach further afield to include the many vocal styles represented in the NATS membership. Her first interviewee is "Vocal Point" founder Leslie Holmes; the printed column about Leslie's work can be found in this issue, while its hybrid "cousin"—the live interview—can be found on the NATS YouTube channel.

Pianists Alison d'Amato and Elvia Puccinelli are the first team to assume the new model of "joint associate editors" as they take over the collaborative piano column begun as "Collab Corner" by Margo Garrett. They will continue to enlighten the NATS membership about the vital role our collaborative partners play in their partnerships with singers, but under the slightly new name "Collaborations." They describe their column as "the landing place for pianists and coaches within the NATS community," with a mission to "serve and support all NATS members by providing engaging, relevant and stimulating content sourced from a range of respected practitioners in the discipline of collaborative music-making."¹² These co-editors aim to "explore, honor, and nurture the alliance between singers and pianists in the NATS community and beyond."¹³ Fittingly, their

first column in this issue, “Margo Garrett: A Model of Mentorship,” honors this column’s founder.

David Meyer and John Nix, the second new team of JOS associate editors, launch a new column called “Practical Voice Science” in this issue. As the title implies, their charge is to focus on translating the science for practical application for our JOS readership, by making voice science concepts understandable, relevant, and actionable for singers, singing teachers, collaborative pianists, opera directors, and choral conductors. These two editors believe that, “as in sports, science may transform the training of singers with individualized tools that enhance the teacher’s experience and intuition,” and add that they “hope these tools may help singers more efficiently reach greater levels of performance.”¹⁴

As Richard Sjoerdsma reported in a previous “Editor’s Commentary,” Justin John Moniz was tapped to continue covering the CCM ground begun by retiring columnist Robert Edwin, with a new column named *The Versatile Voice*.¹⁵ Justin’s first column appears in this issue with aims to “promote the importance and understanding of vocal efficiency and sustainability, provide practical tools derived from evidence based practice, and to enlighten readers as to the benefits of vocal versatility through varied genres and styles of singing.”¹⁶ Moniz further explains that, in addition to traditionally represented Western approaches, the column will “highlight a broad spectrum of styles and their respective performers including an in-depth exploration of technical and stylistic approaches to classical, musical theatre, pop, rock, a cappella, jazz, gospel, country, hip-hop, and various world music idioms.”¹⁷

An Expanded JOS Editorial Board

In order to advance the *Journal of Singing*, I have considerably expanded the editorial board. The seven members of our editorial board with whom I have served over the past ten years (listed above as our editorial board’s “longest serving members”) make up a mighty but rather small board when compared to the relatively large amount of work these professionals volunteer by reviewing each and every submission on a wide-ranging slate of topics. These editorial board members will continue to review submissions on topics directly related to their individual expertise, but will cede authority on specific topics to the following new editorial board members,

who have been specifically tasked to review submissions on the following topics:

- **Medicine and Health:** laryngologists Michael M. Johns III, Lindsay S. Reder and Mark A. Williams, and speech-language pathologists Wendy D. LeBorgne and Deirdre D. Michael will join Robert Sataloff to review submissions on these topics.
- **Psychology and Cognitive Science:** Heidi Moss Erickson and Elisa Monti will join Lynn Maxfield and myself (Lynn Holding) to review submissions on topics in these categories.
- **Voice Science:** Joshua D. Glasner, David Meyer and David Okerlund will join current editorial board members Steve Austin, Ken Bozeman, and John Nix in reviewing all submissions on voice science topics.

The Journal of Singing “Mentored Writing Initiative”

I am delighted to share with NATS members two of my most gratifying initiatives. The first of these is the “Journal of Singing Mentored Writing Initiative.” Over the thirteen years I served on the JOS editorial board, I noticed a specific type of submission that failed to be accepted outright, not because the thoughts in the paper were not compelling, but because their execution was or obscured in some way. Therefore, I am happy to announce my “Mentored Writing Initiative,” which pairs an expert who serves on the JOS editorial board with an author whose submission may generate mixed reviews through our peer review process, yet merits a closer look; if both members of the team agree, the partnership leads to a guided research and writing collaboration. The first article in this occasional series is “The Impact of Blindness on the Physical and Vocal Development of Visually Impaired Singers,” written by author Maria Georgakarakou and mentored by Kenneth Bozeman, and can be found in this issue. Congratulations to both author and mentor for inaugurating this special column.

The Richard Sjoerdsma Excellence in Writing Award

With the help of NATS Development Director Bob Bryan, we created the “Richard Sjoerdsma Excellence in Writing Award” last summer, just in time for the NATS 2022 Chicago conference. It was seeded with generous contributions from the JOS personnel at that

time, and announced to Dr. Sjoerdsma at the biennial JOS conference luncheon, and has since grown due to the generous contributions of many NATS members and former feature authors. The award will be given to the author of a feature article in the *Journal of Singing* judged to be the best in that category over a two-volume period.¹⁸ The winner will be chosen by a subcommittee of JOS (including Richard Sjoerdsma), and the prize will be awarded every other year at the national NATS conference. I look forward to honoring both Richard Sjoerdsma as well as a new crop of feature writers who will keep our membership edified on all aspects of singing, and teaching singing, that should be considered in the twenty-first century.

Avanti!

The three actions that inspire me as the new editor in chief—to understand, value and uphold—relate to both the past and future of our journal, for they both inform and inspire the fourth action, which is to advance. I look truly forward to advancing more *Journal of Singing* initiatives, writers, and columns in the months to come, which I will always announce in this “Editor’s Commentary” column. As the Italians say, “avanti!”

NOTES

1. “NATS Membership,” www.nats.com; accessed 6–26–23.
2. Editing, modern upgrades and the future: A Q&A with Richard Sjoerdsma, NATS Website, May 17, 2022; accessed 6–26–23.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. From the *Proposal for Advance Online Publication of the Journal of Singing* written by the JOS Subcommittee on Advance Online Pre-Publication, February, 2021; private communication.
7. The source for these terms is Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants: Part 1,” *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 3.
8. Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” pg. 1.
9. Lynn Holding, “The Professionalization of Voice,” *Journal of Singing* Vol. 69, no. 5 (May/June 2013): 597- 602.
10. See Rebecca Sinderbrand, “How Kellyanne Conway ushered in the era of ‘alternative facts,’” *Washington Post* January 22, 2017; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/22/how-kellyanne-conway-ushered-in-the-era-of-alternative-facts/>; accessed June 13, 2023.
11. Melissa Treinkman, mission statement for “The Vocal Point” column in the *Journal of Singing*,” private communication, May 2023
12. Alison d’Amato and Elvia Puccinelli, mission statement for the “Collaborations’ column in the *Journal of Singing*,” private communication, May 2023.
13. Ibid.
14. David Meyer and John Nix, mission statement for the “Practical Science” column in the *Journal of Singing*,” private communication, May 2023.
15. The Moniz announcement may be found in the *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 4 (March/April 2023): 435.
16. Justin John Moniz, mission statement for the “Versatile Voice” column in the *Journal of Singing*,” private communication, May 2023.
17. Ibid.
18. Fundraising for the “Richard Sjoerdsma Excellence in Writing Award” is ongoing; please contact NATS Development Director Bob Bryan, bob@nats.org.

Editor in chief **Lynn Holding** is the author of *The Musician's Mind: Teaching, Learning and Performance in the Age of Brain Science*, a book deemed “essential” by *CHOICE Magazine*, “a unique and outstanding contribution to pedagogy” by *Voice and Speech Review*, and a “ground-breaking, invaluable contribution to the field of music pedagogy” by opera star Renée Fleming. Before becoming the journal’s newest editor-in-chief, she founded its “Mindful Voice” column and served on its editorial board from 2009 to the present. Her honors include the 2005 Van Lawrence Voice Fellowship, induction into the American Academy of Teachers of Singing, and recognition as a “legendary figure in the field of voice pedagogy” by the Contemporary Commercial Music Vocal Pedagogy Institute at Shenandoah University, receiving their 2020 *Lifetime Achievement Award*. Her stage credits include leading roles in opera, oratorio and musical theatre. Her commitment to contemporary American music inspired new compositions and a refashioning of the traditional recital into theatrical performance pieces presented on multiple tours throughout the United States, Australia, England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Iceland where her performances were broadcast on Icelandic National Radio. Holding serves as Professor of Practice in Vocal Arts and Opera and coordinator of Vocology and Voice Pedagogy at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music. www.lynnholding.com