

Empowering Voices: Insights for World Voice Day 2025

Alexis Davis-Hazell



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Celebrated annually on April 16, World Voice Day underscores the importance of vocal health and the power of the human voice. In this column, NATS President Alexis Davis-Hazell explores the 2025 theme selected by the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, “Empower Your Voice,” discussing strategies for empowering voices through research, teaching, and community engagement. Placing emphasis on the practices of vocal hygiene and interdisciplinary collaboration, and the role of voice professionals in promoting vocal health, Davis-Hazell acknowledges the significance of global consensus among voice professionals in supporting local communities.

WORLD VOICE DAY

WORLD VOICE DAY (WVD) serves as a global reminder of the critical role our voices play in communication, expression, and connection. The WVD mission centers on providing information for recognizing the signs of vocal issues and methods for maintaining healthy voices, and connecting voice professionals with the public. The Voice Committee of the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery has selected the 2025 WVD theme: “Empower Your Voice.” As singing teachers and voice researchers, we are uniquely positioned to advance our understanding of vocal health community-wide and to empower individuals to care for their voices. Through the lenses of voice training, community outreach, and global collaboration, we can create strategies relevant for both professional and non-professional contexts. Empowerment in the context of World Voice Day involves raising awareness about the information individuals need to take control of their vocal health.¹

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND GLOBAL UNITY OF VOICE PROFESSIONALS

World Voice Day began as Brazilian Voice Day in 1999, initiated by a consortium of voice care professionals in São Paulo, Brazil. The local enterprise quickly gained recognition and inspired international collaboration by 2002. Through acknowledging its origins, we honor the pioneering efforts of Brazilian professionals and celebrate the global expansion of a brilliant idea.

This celebration started in Brazil in 1999 as the Brazilian National Voice Day. It was the result of a mixed initiative of physicians, speech-language pathologists and singing teachers that belonged to the former association ‘Sociedade Brasileira

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de Laringologia e Voz—SBLV’ (Brazilian Society of Laryngology and Voice), under the presidency of Dr. Nedio Steffen. This Brazilian initiative was followed by other countries, such as Argentina and Portugal, and the Brazilian National Voice Day became the International Voice Day. In the United States, the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery officially recognized this celebration in 2002 and in that year the event obtained the name ‘World Voice Day.’²

Engaging with voice professionals from different countries brings varied techniques to the table. This enriching diversity of perspectives contributes to innovative approaches in voice training and therapy. Recognizing the global community fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose among voice professionals worldwide. It emphasizes that vocal health is a universal concern, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. This unity can lead to more collaborative efforts in research, education, and advocacy. Highlighting the achievements of voice professionals worldwide can inspire others and build a sense of global camaraderie.

NATS INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES: POTENTIAL FOR RESOURCE SHARING AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Collaborating with the global community facilitates the sharing of numerous resources, such as study findings, teaching materials, and best practices. This practice elevates the standards of vocal training and care worldwide, ensuring wider access to the latest knowledge and advanced techniques. Through international initiatives, NATS invests time and resources into encouraging international partnerships and exchanges between voice professionals. The original International Advisory Committee formed by past NATS President Karen Brunssen (2018–2020) prompted a dramatic increase of NATS’ international activity outside of North America, which is still growing. This activity led to the formation of the NATS International Region, currently comprising South Korea, Hong Kong, India, South Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Ibero-American Chapters. NATS pedagogy trips in 2019 and 2023 to Germany and England, respectively, were pedagogical exchange programs where NATS members experienced different teaching methods, curricula, and musical traditions,

which enriched their own practices and broadened their understanding of global vocal techniques. This summer, the International Congress of Voice Teachers (ICVT) will be held in Toronto, Canada, co-hosted by NATS, The Royal Conservatory, and the University of Toronto Faculty of Music. Each of these types of engagement represents the spirit of World Voice Day.

SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING OUTREACH

While global collaboration is essential to comprehensive resource sharing and cultural exchange, supporting local communities ensures that the benefits of these partnerships reach individuals at the grassroots level. Designing outreach programs that address the specific needs and interests of different community groups can increase behavior change. For example, targeted workshops for teachers, public speakers, and call center workers can provide practical tips relevant to their daily voice use as a job requirement, and singing is no small part of this strategy!

To enhance our community outreach efforts, we can adopt several strategies that ensure broader engagement and impact:

- 1. Sustainable Collaboration:** Building long-term partnerships with local organizations, schools, and healthcare providers can create sustainable outreach efforts. These alliances can help maintain ongoing vocal health education and support within the community.
- 2. Active Community Engagement:** Implementing strategies such as participatory research methods could ensure that community members are involved in decision-making processes. This approach helps build trust in the relevance of outreach programs and can lead to more sustainable and impactful vocal health education, as community members are more likely to participate and support initiatives to which they feel connected.
- 3. Cultural Relevance:** Localizing global insights ensures that vocal health practices are culturally relevant and accessible. Adapting messaging and visualizations for each culture group or work population can improve the adoption of healthy vocal habits and make their education more relatable and effective.

EMPOWERING VOICES THROUGH RESEARCH

In voice research, empowerment is about advancing our understanding of the voice and translating this knowledge into practical applications. Interdisciplinary collaboration is often key to development of comprehensive approaches to vocal health. For example, as researchers or as patients who receive care, we have seen the use of high-speed imaging and acoustic analysis enhance the ability to study vocal function and disorders. These technologies provide detailed insights into vocal fold behavior and help identify early signs of vocal issues.

As teachers, we want to be aware of the methods used to study and improve vocal function and partner with colleagues to make research findings relatable to the broader community.

Vocal hygiene is a cornerstone of our work training the next generations of performers and teachers for their own sustainable and successful work. As readers of the *Journal of Singing*, *The Journal of Voice*, and other publications addressing topics of professional voice care, we benefit from access to current research that provides valuable evidence for best practices, particularly in the areas of vocal hygiene and the prevention of voice disorders.

It is incumbent upon us to stay apprised of the latest research which either confirms or disputes the practices that we traditionally advise. Combining insights from voice scientists, medical professionals, and educators is essential for developing targeted interventions.

A personal example relates to counsel on hydration. Hydration is universally recommended to maintain mucosal health and vocal fold lubrication. My training included the traditional vocal hygiene recommendation to avoid caffeine, as it has been assumed that caffeine intake has a dehydrating effect on the voice due to its diuretic properties. Studies in the last five years however, challenge that advice, revealing that the amount of caffeine in as much as five cups of coffee (480 mg) does not negatively impact voice production.³

Even while continuing to encourage the overarching necessity of hydration, I now seek out more recent evidence supporting recommendations for proper fluid intake and adjust my language to students accordingly—including monitoring for overhydration.⁴

IMPLICATIONS FOR VOICE TRAINING AND TEACHING SINGING

We support our students' vocal development and health by integrating research findings into our evolving pedagogy. Providing individuals with the resources, knowledge, and support they need to take control of their vocal health and development is instrumental in nurturing a sense of confidence and agency.

For singing teachers, empowerment is producing a learning environment where students can thrive. We cultivate the necessary confidence through helping individuals find their unique voice and express themselves authentically using the following methods.

- **Personalized Instruction:** Recognizing the unique needs and goals of each student is essential. Tailoring teaching methods to address individual strengths and challenges ensures that every student feels valued and supported.
- **Holistic Approach:** Addressing not just the technical aspects of singing, but also the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of students is important. Encouraging students to adopt healthy lifestyles, including proper nutrition, regular exercise, and adequate sleep, supports their vocal development.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Modeling and promoting a culture of lifelong learning encourages students to continue exploring and refining their vocal skills beyond formal education. Providing resources and opportunities for ongoing development is key to improving conditions for working populations over time.

EMPOWERING VOICES IN THE COMMUNITY

Our impact extends beyond the studio, classroom, and lab. Each time you participate in a NATS chapter or region event, you are contributing to the aims of World Voice Day and this year's theme. As an association, NATS supports national programs (available to all members) that align with the aims of empowering voices through research, teaching, and community engagement. Key resources and programs that support these objectives include our workshops and conferences, multiple competition and mentoring programs, National Student Auditions, Vocapedia, The NATS Live Learning Center, NATS Chats, and the *Journal of Singing*.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS AND CONNECTED WORLD

World Voice Day 2025 calls us to empower voices everywhere. Through research, teaching, and community engagement, we can make a lasting impact on vocal health. Promoting vocal hygiene, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and supporting our communities ensures that every voice is heard and valued. Offering resources, professional development opportunities, and opportunities for cooperation, NATS supports the growth and success of voice professionals globally while also addressing local community needs.

Our collective efforts move us toward a more connected and informed world. A balanced approach leverages the strengths of both international collaboration and local engagement. By honoring the origins of World Voice Day in Brazil, the adoption of its principles, and embracing the contributions of voice professionals worldwide, we can advance vocal health education, research, and advocacy.

NATS needs members interested in advocacy efforts to promote both vocal arts and vocal health education in schools, workplaces, and healthcare settings. NATS can contribute to efforts alongside speech and medical professionals advocating for vocal health to be recognized by policymakers and organizations as an essential component of overall well-being. Are you interested in taking part? Contact me at president@nats.org.

NOTES

1. Ian DeNolfo, "Mission Statement," World Voice Day, last modified October 28, 2016, accessed November 13, 2024, <https://worldvoiceday.org/mission-statement/>.
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3. Zoe Weston and Sarah Schneider, "Demystifying Vocal Hygiene: Considerations for Professional Voice Users," *Current Otorhinolaryngology Reports* 11 (October 21, 2023): 387–94, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40136-023-00494-x#citeas>; Maxine Alves, Esedra Krüger, Bhavani Pillay, Kristiane van Lierde, and Jean-nie van Linde, "The Effect of Hydration on Voice Quality in Adults: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Voice* 33, no. 1 (January 2019): 125–31, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0892199717303892>.
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Alexis Davis-Hazell is a singing actor of opera, concert, and musical theatre repertoire. Her performance highlights include operatic and symphonic works with regional organizations in the United States and Mexico, over 130 performances of *Porgy and Bess* at international venues, and contributing to the GRAMMY™-winning album *Grechaninov: Passion Week* with the Phoenix Bach Choir and Kansas City Chorale. Davis-Hazell has over twenty years of teaching experience in adjunct college, tenure-track university, and private studio owner roles, and a variety of higher education administration experience. As an interdisciplinary collaborator and session presenter at conferences and arts research alliances, her research interests include African American folk and art music, Russian art song literature, and lyric diction pedagogy. She served in chapter leadership roles immediately upon joining NATS in 2010. She was a NATS Emerging Leader Award recipient in 2014, and accepted regional appointments in the Cal-Western and Southeastern Regions, as well as national committee appointments. Prior to a focus on NATS' strategic goals as president-elect, Davis-Hazell was instrumental in the development of a comprehensive membership retention and recruitment guide for district NATS leaders. Davis-Hazell is assistant professor of voice and assistant director of undergraduate studies at the University of Alabama School of Music. <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9558-109>