

Carole Blankenship

World Voice Day: An Important Message



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OUR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES on the World Voice Day Committee have chosen a reverberating theme for April 16, 2021, “One World, Many Voices.” The World Voice Day organization was founded in 1999, according to their mission statement, with the purpose of sharing “the Excitement of the Voice Phenomenon with the Public, Scientists and Funding Bodies.” From the World Voice Day website: “The mission of the group is to share the excitement of voice science, pedagogy and the vocal arts as an application of all the above-mentioned areas with the public and with funding bodies by organizing a global celebration of the World Voice Day on April 16 each year, joining forces with existing groups that have the same goal.”

With this year’s theme, “One World, Many Voices,” the group is proclaiming that singing and using our voices is inclusive. To be truly inclusive, singers and teachers must convey the sentiment that all types of singing, styles, or genres, are equal in value.

As part of the 2020 Strategic Plan, the leadership at NATS wrote new values statements, two statements of which genuinely acclaim the WVD theme for this year. One of the five statements promises that NATS will “encourage individual skills and creativity.” There are no qualifiers here; we are not encouraging or praising particular skills and specific creation, but instead, all skills and creativity. With this statement, NATS emboldens all people, especially all singers and teachers, to create, to strive to learn and do more. The other value statement that resonates here is, “NATS will celebrate and recognize the value and efforts of all.” This statement does not assert that we celebrate a particular pedigree or path or that we recognize unique practices of singing and performing. “All” means all.

I have mentioned in an earlier column that the new Diversity and Inclusion statement for our association is crucial in that it holds us accountable to truly include all. Here is the statement for you to share with members in your chapter and with those you hope to invite into your chapter.

NATS strives to be a welcoming and supportive community of members and students who celebrate the unique identities, varied backgrounds, and experiences of all individuals. We are dedicated to ensuring that all voices are valued and heard in an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all.

This statement should inform all facets of our work with students and colleagues in and out of our association and in collaboration with other organizations.

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In support of the Diversity and Inclusion statement, NATS developed a toolkit, enthusiastically endorsed by the NATS Advocacy Committee (https://www.nats.org/_Library/docs/NATS_Diversity_and_Inclusion_Toolkit_Final_FINAL_6_16_20.pdf). The clear purpose of this toolkit is to identify best practices for promoting diversity and inclusion within NATS. The first guideline in that toolkit reads, “A community that values diversity and inclusion is a place where leaders, members, and students of members demonstrate their respect for each individual’s unique attributes. It is an environment that values diversity and inclusion requiring us to understand and respect the beliefs, values, and ethics of others while demonstrating our ability to effectively work with, communicate with, and interact with a diverse community of individuals.” It is the desired outcome for all to feel that they belong to our chapters and regions. Belonging is the desired outcome of successfully “ensuring that all voices are valued and heard in an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all.” This quote makes up half of the new NATS vision statement.

The NATS Diversity and Inclusion statement and toolkit reflect many of the initiatives underway in NATS chapters around the country. Two of these initiatives have been offered virtually during the past year. The first is a series coordinated by the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter. The chapter’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee, led by co-chairs Dr. Phillip Harris and Dr. Juanita Ulloa, has offered a webinar series, *Songs for All Voices*, produced to explore and celebrate solo vocal music and composers of all races, ethnicities, and identities and experience virtually in Fall 2020.

On the other coast, the chapter of NATS Boston, under the leadership of President Kayla Gautreaux and Director of Community Relations Jessica Cooper, in conjunction with the Boston Singers’ Resource and The Greater Boston Choral Consortium, presented a 4-session webinar series titled, “Table for More: Race, Access, Inclusion, Equity, Making Room in the Singing Arts.” In this series, hosted by G. Phillip Schultz III of Vocal Essence (Minneapolis), the chapter raised awareness of discrimination and injustice in our field, and especially issues surrounding “accessibility, inclusion, and equity.” Two of the sessions are available for all on YouTube, and I encourage you to view and experience

these important videos (<https://www.natsboston.org/table-for-more.html>).

It is at the NATS chapter level that people, including students, teachers, and other voice professionals, get involved and therefore belong to the group. These efforts by the SFBA Chapter NATS and NATS Boston are wonderful projects that lead our association in the ways of diversity, inclusion, and equity.

When the leaders of NATS prepared the new Strategic Plan document in 2020, they committed to the ongoing process of inclusion. At that time, we also determined that we needed an inspirational phrase for the first page of the plan. That axiom reads simply: “Many Voices, One Passion, Singing.” This opening statement essentially embodies the WVD 2021 theme chosen this year. In the many organizations that promote singing, awareness recently has been growing concerning the need to support each other in our work. That has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic. We do not claim to own the best pedagogy, ideas, or genre, but instead encourage all to use their authentic voice, always teaching and learning with the most recent science and research. “One World, Many Voices” reminds us to invite all to the community of teachers of singing. How will you celebrate April 16, 2021? Let me know how you will invite others to join you, your colleagues, and/or your students. A true invitation is the beginning of including all.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours:
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I’d rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

William Wordsworth, “The world is too much with us”

Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

One World, Many Voices



Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

You, my own deep soul,
trust me. I will not betray you.
My blood is alive with many voices
telling me I am made of longing.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

WHO KNEW?

As I think back a year ago to the theme of World Voice Day 2020, “Focus on Your Voice in 2020,” and while I was drafting my “Editor’s Commentary” for the March/April issue of the journal, I had little reason to anticipate the irony that the theme subsequently would accrue. It is jarring to contemplate that by April 16 a full blown COVID-19 pandemic had cast that theme in a considerably different light along with, of course, myriad other ramifications. Our “normal” pedagogic focus on the voice morphed from in-person to virtual, and as means became menace,¹ we discovered new venues for individual and group performance. In retrospect, which almost always is 20/20, the voice community demonstrated remarkable resilience in developing various new lenses to focus on voice in response to the unusual challenges thrust upon it, lenses that significantly impact how we go forward in 2021 and beyond.

The WVD theme for this year, “One World, Many Voices,” carries its own little bit of irony. A pandemic is (usually) a disease that is prevalent over a country or the entire planet, and in that sense is a rather grim reminder of the “one world” concept. (“We’re all in this together.”) But the theme offers numerous other avenues to explore, from broad application to narrower ones.

In a global sense, we are one world, populated by 7–8 billion souls, divided among 200–250 countries, depending upon the source consulted. Throughout this one world, many voices communicate in about 6500 languages. Importantly, however, in our various cultures and in multitudinous modes of expression, we all sing.

For many years, I conducted a local German male chorus. Once, while on a concert tour of the homeland, our host choir displayed a banner in the concert hall that proclaimed, “Die Musik kennt keine Grenzen” (music knows no borders). The world of song is one world, but with many different modes of expression, quite beyond our usual palette of art song, lieder, *mélodie*, opera, and show tunes. My position as editor of the *Journal of Singing* has expanded my awareness of the “many voices” of solo song, an education that began early with my preparation of Bill Lavonis’s article on Native American song,² and continued with an introduction to overtone singing through the work of Stuart Hinds.³ Additionally, my knowledge of *Sprechstimme* was greatly

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expanded by a posthumous article by Joseph Smith, as was, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Robert Edwin, my awareness of the astonishing variety of CCM and other styles. At an unforgettable opening session of the ICVT-17 in Stockholm, I along with other attendees were treated to demonstrations of *kulning*, a nontextual vocalism used as herding calls in Sweden and Norway, and *jojkning*, traditional song of the Sámi culture. More recently, I was introduced by American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS) colleague Jeanie LoVetri to *carnatic* singing, a predominant form of Indian classical song.⁵ All of the above, of course, is merely a miniscule scratch on the proverbial surface; we live in a world rich with vocal expression.

We turn also to the world of fact-based voice pedagogy, expressed, as the pages of this periodical attest, in many voices. Voice pedagogy may be couched in high tech, low-tech, and no-tech studios.⁶ We teach using Zoom and in studio or home; VoceVista and video recorder; demonstration and description; physiology and psychology; tools and toys; inspiration and perspiration. We are one in NATS, all in service to the same product: many free, expressive voices.

Finally, we are one in song. Perhaps the most vivid illustration of this principle—as well as of the current WVD theme—may be seen and heard on Zoom and YouTube, as singers from all over the globe virtually unite in choral expression. “Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial ball . . .” join their many voices in one world of song.

As we search for new ways to commemorate WVD 21, let us constantly be aware that we are one world, many voices, united in the act and art of our “holde Kunst.”

Upon her retirement from Northern Arizona University, Judith Cloud has decided to resign from the *Journal of Singing* Editorial Board. I am grateful to Judith for her short time with us and for her valued contributions. At the same time, I am delighted to welcome noted singer, pedagogue, and scholar Dr. Trineice Robinson-Martin to the board. With her extensive experience in jazz, gospel, rock, and pop styles Trineice brings a vital new dimension to the board.

NOTES

1. I first used this phrase in an earlier “Editor’s Commentary.” Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, “Life in the Time of Corona,” *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 1 (September/October 2020): 3.
2. William Lavonis, “‘You Pray Double When You Sing’: A Study in Native American Singing and Song,” *Journal of Singing* 60, no. 4 (March/April 2004): 341–355.
3. Stuart Hinds, “Argument for the Investigation and Use of Overtone Singing,” *Journal of Singing* 62, no. 1 (September/October 2005): 33–40.
4. Joseph Smith, “Sprechstimme,” *Journal of Singing* 72, no. 5 (May/June 2016): 547–562.
5. Jeannette LoVetri, email to author (November 8, 2020).
6. David Meyer and Lynn Holding, “Practical Science in the Studio: ‘No-Tech’ Strategies,” *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 3 (January/February 2021): 359–367; John Nix, David Meyer, Ron Scherer, and Deirdre Michael, “Practical Science in the Studio, Part 2: ‘Low-Tech’ Strategies,” *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 4 (March/April 2021): 509–513; [article forthcoming] *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 5 (May/June 2021).



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