

# The omnivorous voice

## Exploring the pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics, and vocal tastes in contemporary (American) musical theatre

Guro von Germeten





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*I'm being pulled in a new direction, but I think I like it; I think I like it. I'm being pulled in a new direction. Through my painful pursuit, somehow birdies took root. All the things I detested, impossibly cute. God! What do I do? Pulled, pulled, pulled.*

Wednesday, *The Addams Family* (Lippa, 2010)

*Broadway has the power to inspire, enrich and entertain, and together we are committed to making that vital spirit a reality. Once our stages are lit again, we will welcome fans back with open arms so that they can continue to experience the joy, heart, and goodwill that our shows so passionately express every night.*

Paulson (2020)

*What matters is what happens, what it does, what comes to light, in oneself and in things—and not what one is seeking. It is a question of sensing, of being taken, of feeling. But it is in no way a passive state: this making available in oneself could be not more active, as the word 'passion' effectively connotes; it passes through an intense mobilization of one's abilities, it is backed up by skills and traditions, objects and tools. It has a history, it defines a collectivity.*

Hennion (2007, p. 109)

## Prologue

Seven months into this PhD project, everything changed. A tiny virus made us all act and do differently—or, more precisely, it made us all stop: stop, pause, and think. Broadway, “the great white way,” went black before our eyes, and in New York, “the city that never sleeps”—which had kept its stage lights lit through wars, recessions, 9/11, and the AIDS epidemic—the shows did not go on. “Theater is my beat. Times Square is my territory. And now it's transformed,” wrote *New York Times* journalist Michael Paulson (2020). Everything had changed.

Before its closing, Broadway was booming, bringing in about \$1.8 billion in ticket sales and attracting close to 15 million audience members during the 2018/2019 season (Hodge, 2020). When performances were suspended, 16 shows had been scheduled to open before the Tony Award deadline in late April. Instead, their openings and the award show were postponed indefinitely, leading new productions to announce their closing even before they opened.

My first trip to the city to assemble data for this project was canceled. My clear vision of spending entire days at the New York Library watching video recordings of Broadway shows faded into fantasy. The questions I had longed to ask renowned Broadway voice teachers were put to rest. My tickets for *Hadestown*, *Hamilton*, and *Dear Evan Hanson* were refunded.

Here in Norway, “my” musical theatre students were hit hard as well. Their college campuses were shut down, and at the Norwegian College of Musical Theatre (now intergrated as a bachelor in musical theatre at Kristiania University College), the students’ final production, Andrew Lippa’s *The Addams Family*, was reduced by hygiene directives and occupancy limits to a mere presentation of scene-studies. Scenes had to be rewritten. Only three people were allowed on stage, and only two others—the director and a vocal coach—were allowed in the room. The orchestra and pianist were seated in *chambres séparées*. Choreography was made to always keep performers at least two meters apart. Fortunately, the characters of the Adams family are so emotionally distant that, in a weird sort of way, it all came together anyway and made a strange kind of sense.

The close connections between the American and the Norwegian musical theatre scenes became very real to me in the first weeks of lockdown. I turned to the American Musical Theatre Educators’ Alliance (MTEA) for advice on how to teach my voice lessons via Zoom. Composer Andrew Lippa and vocal coach Sheri Sanders were “brought in” online to inspire the students in the new contours of their everyday life. About a hundred people gathered in a virtual classroom, where the students performed with both humility and excitement in the presence of Broadway stardom—directly from their small dorm rooms or shared apartments. Lonely musical theatre performers under quarantine here, in Norway, found solace and solidarity in conversation with lonely musical theatre performers under quarantine there, in New York.

Writing the first draft of this prologue, I had no idea how the next years would play out. I did not know that Broadway would stay closed for 18 months. I did not know the rush I would feel when finally seeing *Hadestown* straight after the Broadway’s re-opening. I did not know how much I would miss performing or being in the voice studio with my students. I did not know how frustrated one could become when communicating only through electronic devices. However, I also did not know how much I would love being stuck in lockdown with my books, my thoughts, and my cast recordings. Or how the musical theatre world would use the pandemic to take in and appreciate the hard and crucial work of understudies or swings. Or how we were given time to actually (start) acknowledging the meanings of the rise in strength of the Black Lives Matter movement and its implications for and within the

profession. In other words, I did not know how the pandemic would make us all contemplate, change, and cherish differently.

This is not a PhD dissertation about the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a dissertation about the exciting pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics, and vocal tastes in contemporary musical theatre. However, the thesis's becoming has been situated in a very strange period of musical theatre history from which it cannot be fully extracted. So, now, almost four years later, having finished what ended up being everything I never planned for—and yet, still somewhat the same—I feel very grateful. I feel grateful to see my work on paper. I feel grateful for those I encountered along the way—live or on Zoom—and I feel grateful to have experienced a *pause* that has affected what we do, how we think and, arguably, how we sing as well. But most of all, I am grateful that the theatre lights are lit once again on Broadway, in Oslo, in the West End, and beyond. My heart needs for that to be.

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Even though writing a PhD thesis is a lonely matter, I never felt alone during these four years. Therefore, a long list of “thank yous” is in order:

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Guro von Germeten, Nesodden 2023

# Abstract

Musical theatre is a rapidly changing art form integrating and absorbing a wide range of musical genres and styles to its repertoire of musical works. As a result, the art form's vocal-musical styles are in constant flux, and the criteria for aesthetic valuation or vocal behaviors are nebulous and ever-changing. In recent decades, research into the voice's physical side has increased our understanding of how the voice works. However, the relationship between voice and the environment, culture, and society in which voice and vocal music exist remains less well explored. Therefore, this thesis aims to expand the knowledge base of what is termed the human voice's social side, by exploring the pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics, and vocal tastes within musical theatre. To work toward such an aim, a theoretical framework of cultural omnivorousness—as coined by American sociologist Richard Peterson—is implemented. However, the framework is shifted from its core within cultural consumption to areas of cultural production and artistic processes. Moreover, to explore such omnivorous artistic and embodied practices, the framework is expanded with writings on tastes by French sociologist Antoine Hennion.

The thesis is written from the stance of being a teacher of musical theatre voice within higher education and is situated within the larger umbrella of practitioner research. It consists of four published articles and an extended summary, and the overall research process is divided into three explorative stances: 1) a theoretical and conceptual level, linked to theories of omnivorousness and tastes; 2) a practice level, initiating shared explorations through an action research-inspired study with musical theatre bachelor students; and 3) a more discursive level, interviewing leading voice teachers in the Broadway community.

The thesis contributes to the scholarly fields of music education, cultural sociology, musicology, and voice studies in various ways. First, it brings an underexplored research field—musical theatre voice—to its forefront. Second, it contributes by highlighting how tastes make up a part of cultural production and artistic processes, and not only of cultural consumption. Third, it contributes to the performative or practice turn within the arts and social sciences by focusing on performance practices in writing musical theatre history. Furthermore, the thesis offers the concept of the omnivorous voice, a concept manifesting the volume, intensity, and intricacy of the vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics that are involved, for example, when performing contemporary musical theatre voice.

## Sammendrag

Musikkteater er en kunstform i konstant utvikling som stadig absorberer og inkluderer nye musikalske sjangere i sitt repertoar. Som en konsekvens er kunstformens vokale stilarter i bevegelse, og kriterier for estetisk bedømmelse og vokal praksis er ikke ensartede eller åpenbare, men også i stadig endring. De siste tiårenes vokalforskning har økt forståelsen vår av hvordan stemmen er bygget opp og opererer, sett fra et anatomisk, fysiologisk eller akustisk perspektiv. Det finnes imidlertid mer begrenset forskning på forholdet mellom den menneskelige stemme og omgivelsene, kulturen og samfunnet rundt denne. Dette doktorgradsarbeidet fokuserer derfor på stemmens såkalte sosiale sider, og utforsker mangfoldet av stemmebruk, vokalestetikker og vokal smak i moderne musikkteater. For å jobbe mot et slikt mål, er et teoretisk rammeverk om kulturell altetenhet av den amerikanske kultursosiologen Richard Peterson implementert. Rammeverket er dog flyttet fra sitt kjerneområde innen kulturkonsumering, til undersøkelser av kulturproduksjon og kunstneriske, kroppsliggjorte prosesser. For å muliggjøre en slik overgang, er Petersons rammeverk utvidet med teorier om smak hentet fra den franske sosiologen Antoine Hennion.

Avhandlingen er skrevet fra et ståsted som vokallærer i høyere musikkteaterutdanning og er posisjonert innen praksisforskning. Den består av fire publiserte artikler og en kappe. Forskningsprosessen er delt inn i tre lag: 1) et teoretisk og konseptuelt lag knyttet til teorier om altetenhet og smak, 2) et praksis-utforskende lag bestående av en aksjonsforskningsinspirert studie med musikkteaterstudenter, og 3) et mer diskursivt orientert lag i form av en intervjustudie med prominente vokallærere på Broadway.

Som helhet bidrar avhandlingen til feltene musikkpedagogikk, kultursosiologi, musikkvitenskap og voice studies. Først og fremst setter den søkelys på et under-utforsket felt, nemlig musikkteater, musikkteatersang og musikkteaterstemmen. Dernest fokuserer den på smakens rolle i kunstneriske prosesser. Avhandlingen bidrar også til å sette fokus på utøvernes rolle i musikkteaterhistorien. I tillegg tilbyr den sitt eget teoretiske bidrag, den altetende stemmen, et konsept som manifesterer og belyser volumet, intensiteten og kompleksiteten av stemmebruk og vokalestetikker involvert når sang og stemme i moderne musikkteater utøves.

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von Germeten, G. (2022). *Preparing for the next new: Interviews with elite voice teachers in the Broadway community*. Care and compassion in music education. Nordic Network for Research in Music Education, Online.

von Germeten, G. (2023). *Making the omnivorous voice more omnivorous: Contemplation—the silver lining of COVID-19—and its effect on musical theatre's vocal aesthetics*. Moving the Line: Discovering Generation MT. Musical Theatre Educators' Alliance, New York.

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von Germeten, G. (2023). "I find it exciting to play wise:" *Exploratory practice, an empowering enabler of collaborative arts-based research?* AR@Kristiania, Oslo.

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# 1 Introduction

The point of departure for this doctoral thesis is the following wonderment statement: *How—out of all the sounds the human voice is able to make—do we come to sound the ways we do in musical theatre today?* Or, using the words of philosopher Lydia Goehr (1992), it stems from a “sense of wonder at how human practices come to be, succeed in being and continue to be regulated by one set of ideas rather than another” (p. 243). To carve out possible answers to such curiosities, this thesis explores the pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics, and vocal tastes—or what I will name the vocal omnivorousness—within the art form. This is an exploration embarked upon to understand more about, and bring awareness to, how these elements form, impact, and negotiate one another in the field of musical theatre voice today.

Musical theatre, in general—and the American musical, in particular—is described as rapidly changing art form, continuously including and absorbing a wide range of musical genres and styles to its portfolio of significant works (Benson, 2018; Cox, 2020; Hoch, 2018; Kayes, 2015; Melton, 2007). “What’s going on on Broadway?” asks Edwin (2009, p. 71); “simply put, Broadway, like our universe, continues to expand” he goes on to answer. Thus, Broadway’s musical and vocal styles are unceasingly in flux (Freeman et al., 2015), and the criteria for aesthetic valuation or vocal behaviors are nebulous and ever-changing (Flynn, 2022b). As expressed by Asare (2022), “expansive, reiterated, powerful, nuanced, and commercial, the musical theatre singing voice is ever in the process of being remade” (p. 63).

In 2006, Hall defined the musical styles within music theatre as country, folk, gospel, rhythm and blues, jazz, swing, rock, and pop (Hall, 2006). Today, such a list would not be written without including at least rap/hip hop, as heard in *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015<sup>1</sup>), and various folk styles, such as Middle Eastern folk music heard in *The Bands Visit* (Yazbek, 2017), or klezmer, as heard in *Caroline, or Change* (Tesori, 2021). The style of classical music is also still standing strong on the Broadway stage, manifested in new shows such as *The Light in the Piazza* (Guettel, 2005) or *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* (Lutvak, 2014), as well as in successful revivals, such as *Carousel* (Rodgers, 2018) or *Into the Woods* (Sondheim, 2022).

To understand “what is going on on Broadway” and thus, arguably also beyond, this thesis claims that there is a sense of omnivorousness (Peterson, 1992) in play. In other words, within contemporary (American) musical theatre, there is a wide variety of broad, hybrid, and fragmented musical taste patterns, manifested in an array of incorporated—*gorged on*—musical styles, musical idioms, and musical practices. *Omnivorousness*—or in its adjective form,

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1 When specific shows are referenced in this thesis, the name of composer and year refer to a specific recording (usually the original cast recording), not the year of a show’s first appearance.

*omnivorous*—is in everyday life a term describing animals feeding on a variety of food with both plant and animal origins, as in ‘pigs are omnivorous animals’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). In such a context, omnivorousness may be understood as a resourcefulness, a bodily urge, or necessity, where feeding off a broad diet may enhance the animal’s chances for survival. However, when utilized as a metaphor for activities of the mind, omnivorousness is seen to have both negative and positive connotations. Negativity is ascribed to an indiscriminating act of taking in or consuming whatever is available, without regard for quality or any desire to dig deeper, such as ‘an omnivorous reader’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). More positively, however, it is linked to personal qualities such as curiosity, openness, or an enthusiastic interest in many different areas of a subject, such as ‘a child with an omnivorous curiosity’ (Oxford Languages, 2023). Within the field of cultural sociology, *cultural omnivorousness* is a concept describing a phenomenon in Western countries where, over time, a sector of the population comes to prefer and consume a greater variety of cultural forms than it had previously, combined with a willingness to transcend or cross-over classifications of so-called “high” and “low” art forms and cultural activities (Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992). Thereby, the metaphor of omnivorousness is linked to the metaphor and concept of *taste*.

The notion of the omnivore has inspired a large number of studies worldwide, spanning much of Europe, Australia, and North America (see Peterson, 2005, for an overview), exploring the changing dynamics of post- or late modern cultural life. Recently, attention has been given to whether omnivorousness is a contemporary trend existing within cultural production as well (see, e.g., Vinge & Stavrum, 2022; Wright, 2011). For example, scrutinizing Chinese professional choral singers, Luo (2019) asks the encircling question, *what if musicians are becoming omnivorous too?* In addition, Peterson (1997) himself, as well as Hazir and Warde (2016) and Wright (2011), argue that the pluralities of popular music and omnivore research would benefit from more thorough exploration of the processes involved in cultural production—i.e., by artists and the industry. This thesis embarks on a similar exploration, arguing that the omnivorousness prevalent in musical theatre is not a phenomenon restricted to the audiences and consumers of an art form, but rather that it is a phenomenon produced, brought about, and enjoyed by the art form’s composers, producers, and performers alike. Thus, omnivorousness in musical theatre ultimately manifest itself as artistic, embodied practices.

When it comes to the artistic, embodied practice of singing, musical theatre’s expanding vocal-musical aesthetics does therefore not lead to an increased vocal specialization within the profession. Instead, there exists a strong expectation that the contemporary musical theatre performer should master this wide variety of incorporated styles, within one voice and within one body (Bourne et al., 2011; Cox, 2020; Flynn, 2022b). Acknowledging this trend, LoVetri et

al. argue that “Everybody Needs to Sing Everything,” (2014, p. 65), and Johnson et al. claim that “having multiple voices is not the exception in musical theatre, it is the norm,” (2019, p. 41).

Musical theatre performers are frequently seen and heard performing a specific show in the evenings, rehearsing another by day, while auditioning for a third or fourth, all within various vocal stylistic idioms. This quest for vocal versatility is also manifested in musical theatre education curricula worldwide<sup>2</sup> and in musical theatre performers’ personal audition books—which contain, for example, eight to ten pieces spanning musical theatre history and different musical theatre styles (Moore, 2017). As Edwin (2009) describes, “it’s not uncommon for a comprehensive MT performer to have everything from an operatic aria to a Miley Cyrus song in her audition book” (p. 72). Furthermore, Broadway stars such as Kristin Chenoweth or Kelli O’Hara are frequently performing—to the delight of audiences—showstoppers such as *The Girl in 14G* (alternating between belting, jazz and classical singing, moving between scat riffs and parts of Mozart’s *Queen of the Night*), or *They Don’t Let You in the Opera if You’re a Country Star* (showcasing speechlike country twang and vocal breaks, combined with dramatic operatic sections and an impressive high C)(Lister, 2013). “All boys are bari-tenors; all girls are sopranos who belt,” Saunders-Barton (2007, p. 58) concludes. In other words, not only are musical theatre performers voicing omnivorousness on the level of the art form, but in the history of musical theatre through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a turn from univorous to omnivorous vocal performers (see Article 1)—that is, performers who resolutely pursue mastery of what in this thesis will be conceptualized as *the omnivorous voice*.

The concept of “the omnivorous voice” posits that the human voice inhabits a wide variety of vocal aesthetic *possibilities* but that its performed vocal behaviors will always be brought into being in dialogue with, gorging on, or having attachments to cultural values, such as vocal aesthetics traditions, genres, styles, or tastes. In addition, the concept underlines emphasizes that the human voice possesses the ability to be re-assembled when faced with different or changing vocal aesthetic demands or wishes. Teaching this omnivorous musical theatre voice or training to master vocal omnivorousness arguably require a different vocal pedagogical approach and understanding of voice than teaching or specializing in a single vocal-musical genre. However, within the broader field of musical, vocal, and performing arts pedagogy and education, vocal specialization is the norm and vocal training is usually separated into specific genre brackets (Kayes, 2015). As a result, there is a scarcity of both practical know-how

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2 As an example, the bachelor students (2019–2022) in musical theatre at Kristiania University College are expected to present, amongst an array of other things, one song from before 1960 (exam first year) and a song demanding classical voice technique, legit singing (exam, first and second year), a novelty/character song (exam second year), a song from a commercial musical written after 1970 written in pop/rock style (exam second year) and a song from a non-musical theatre pop/rock repertoire (third year).

and theoretical research on how pluralities of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics are taught, understood, and maneuvered.

## 1.1 Problem statement and research questions

Singing is a complex task involving physical, neurological, aerodynamic, psychological, and social processes. In recent decades, research into the voice's physical side—vocal anatomy, voice physiology, and vocal acoustics—has substantially increased our understanding of how the voice works, including within the context of musical theatre (see, e.g., Björkner, 2006; Echternach et al., 2014; Flynn et al., 2018; Kayes, 2015, 2019; McGlashan et al., 2017). The relationship between voice and the environment, culture, and society in which voice and music exist—as well as the bearing these contextual elements have on vocal sound qualities and their applied technical behavior—is, by comparison, largely unexplored (Harrison & O'Bryan, 2014). The consequence of such a lack of research may be a voice view where the human voice with its vocal practices is seen as singular, unchangeable, static, or innate in nature and is not perceived as dynamic cultural articulations existing within specific times and spaces (Eidsheim, 2019; Meizel, 2020). As Taylor (2012) argues, some parts of vocal practices—such as words, melody, or rhythm—are consciously and openly considered learned and (re)produced. By contrast, others—such as tone, timbre, or intonation—are repeatedly situated as natural or innate.

This thesis's overall purpose is therefore to expand the knowledge base of what is termed the human voice's *social side*. In other words, its purpose is to find out more about how the human voice's complex anatomical structures (including the size and shape of the vocal apparatus) with its biomechanical functions are negotiated and maneuvered through signifying human practices such as processes of vocal aesthetic choices, vocal tastes, musical conventions, or specific genre demands—using musical theatre voice as context and playground for its exploration. This thesis is therefore regarded as a thesis of *the sung*: the sound of a voice and its vocal behaviors (Symonds, 2014). It is not a thesis of *the song*—in other words, the written musical theatre work—which is a more common research object in musical theatre history. To honor this difference, the published articles and this extended summary refer to specific recordings, parts, and performers throughout. This approach seeks to strengthen the line of argumentation and illustrate specific points, but also to spotlight and elevate the role of performers and performances in creating the history of musical theatre. On that account, it is hoped that interested parties will stop and listen to (as I see it, beautiful) music from time to time as they read this work.

To advance toward such an overall aim, I also apply a theoretical and conceptual framework of taste and cultural omnivorousness as introduced by American scholar Richard Peterson (Peterson, 1992, 2005; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992; Rossman & Peterson, 2015). However, in transposing the omnivorous framework from its core within general cultural consumption to specific areas of cultural production and artistic processes, the framework is expanded and combined with writings on taste by French musicologist and sociologist Antoine Hennion (2003, 2004, 2007, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2019). In short, Hennion regards taste as a performance that acts, engages, transforms, and is felt. Furthermore, he considers taste to be an *attachment* to the world, oneself, and others (human or non-human). This thesis thereby combines research questions from the field of *music education* with thoughts and theories from the field of *cultural sociology*. It also implements thoughts and traditions from the academic fields of *musicology*—with its performative turn and performance studies (see, e.g., Cook, 2009, 2014a, 2014b)—as well as writings from the more newly established *voice studies* (see, e.g., Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019). The latter is a scholarly field seeking to “negotiate links and connections in the slippages between philosophical discourses, the praxis and pedagogy of training and using the voice, and the act of experiencing ‘the voice’—in its many and varied forms” (Macpherson & Thomalis, 2013).

Arguably, working within—or in between—various academic fields invites the possibility of a variety of methodological approaches. Accordingly, both theoretically informed discussions, action research-inspired student work, and interview inquiry are employed in this thesis to triangulate and explore the pluralities of vocal tastes, vocal aesthetics, and vocal behaviors within contemporary musical theatre. However, to ensure that the thesis will present as a unified body of work, all explorations are conducted within the guidance and frame of the same main research question:

*How can the pluralities of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics in contemporary musical theatre—and, implicitly, the human voice itself—be understood and maneuvered through a conceptual framework of the omnivorous voice?*

This main research question is complemented by the following sub-questions:

1. *How is the phenomenon of (vocal) omnivorousness manifested and (re)produced within musical theatre voice today?*
2. *How does taste play a role in the formation of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics in present-day musical theatre?*

These three questions are further broken down into questions guiding the thesis's four articles:

Article 1 (von Germeten & Karlsen, 2022): *How is cultural omnivorousness manifested in the American musical with respect to patterns of cultural consumption as well as production—both contemporary and in a historical perspective? And what do the omnivorous features of the American musical demand from its performers—or, in other words, what does it take to perform the omnivorous voice?*

Article 2 (von Germeten, 2021): *How can a musical's original cast recording be conceptualized as a vocal script, and what is such a vocal script's role in forming contemporary musical theatre performers and performances existing within an omnivorous vocal world?*

Article 3 (von Germeten, 2022b): *How do students perform, test, and negotiate vocal tastes when exploring a new repertoire in a higher musical theatre education course?*

Article 4 (von Germeten, 2023): *How are vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice understood, maneuvered, and expanded within the frames of teaching musical theatre singing today?*

These four articles also illuminate the *in-betweenness* of scholarly fields this thesis offers: Article 1 is published in a cultural sociology-based journal (*Cultural Sociology*); Article 2, in a journal directed towards voice teachers and speech pathologists (*Voice and Speech Review*); Article 3, within the field of music education research (*Research Studies in Music Education*); and Article 4, in a musicology-informed journal (*Studies in Musical Theatre*). This thesis thereby engages in discussions within the social sciences as well as within the humanities.

## **1.2 Why singing? Situating the thesis within practice-based research**

Two reasons underlie the choice to focus this thesis solely on voice and singing, and therefore to the exclusion of other aspects of musical theatre. First and foremost, because I am a singer and a voice teacher myself, this PhD is written from the perspective of a vocal practitioner and aims to create knowledge from practice for practice. Accordingly, the thesis is situated within the larger umbrella of *practitioner research* or *practitioner inquiry* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), research that is identified by its explorations and aims set from the perspective of a practitioner already engaged in practice, often within the context of their own practices (Kemmis, 2012). Oram (2015) identifies a growing need for voice trainers within higher



education to become researchers. Rikandi (2012) similarly argues that the topical issues within music education research must interact with the teachers' day-to-day practices.

In recent decades, teaching musical theatre voice has been considered largely synonymous with teaching other popular musical-vocal styles; however, it is an emerging view in the profession that there are significant differences between these pedagogical brackets (Edwards & Hoch, 2018). Accordingly, I answer Oram's and Rikandi's calls by conducting this research from the stance of a voice teacher who teaches musical theatre voice in higher musical theatre education. Consequently, the thesis's research design and methodological choices revolve around axes of my everyday life, inspired by such questions as: *How do I, together with my students, maneuver, understand and negotiate the prevalent vocal omnivorousness within the profession? Whom do I turn to when in need of learning more about the ever-changing profession's vocal work?* I use the *I* actively while writing. I occasionally also use *we* in reference to those of us who sing and/or teach singing within the profession. This use of personal pronouns furthermore underlines an ethical stance taken within this work; I see myself doing research *with* people—students, fellow voice teachers, and published scholars—and not necessarily *on* people (Nygreen, 2009).

Throughout my time as a PhD research fellow, I have been teaching professionals in my own vocal studio, as well as students pursuing bachelor's degrees in musical theatre and acting at Kristiania University College. Kristiania University College is also where part of the thesis's empirical data was gathered. Turning my everyday practices into a PhD project offers rich opportunities for intensive reflection alongside practicing the activities I am most passionate about (referring Dunbar, 2014). Therefore, multiple theoretical discussions and different methodological strategies are implemented to broaden my horizons and to make me understand, explore, and expand my practice knowledge further than would have been possible without this journey. These theoretical and methodological elements are also implemented to secure the thesis's credibility and trustworthiness within the various academic fields it involves. I earnestly hope that my writings will be found relevant for other vocal practitioners as well, as the validation of practice-based research commonly manifests itself in a change of practices (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This change may take the form of enhanced conceptual frameworks, altered ways of teaching (or perhaps singing), or reconstructed curricula (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Transforming my teaching from a private activity to a public one, I also open myself and my practice community to discussion and critique—a dialogue that I hope will continue beyond the scope, time, and place of this thesis.

My second reason for focusing on voice is motivated by its significant role within the art form. Arguably, the voice is musical theatre's "single principal instrument" (Symonds, 2018)

and “the currency by which musicals exchange value” (Johnson, personal correspondence, June 24, 2020). As described by Johnson et al. (2019): “it is towards the voice we crane for meaning,” (p. 35) counting on it to narrate our stories, with and without words, and “singing ability is the first and most demanding requirement for musical theatre performers” Wolff adds (2018, p. 13). In other words, without the art of singing, there would be no musicals at all.

### 1.3 Why vocal tastes? On me as a researcher, teacher, and performer

Two statements I heard early in life have influenced this thesis. The first, “You have such a classical voice; it is perfect for Mozart and Rossini, but you will never sing pop music with that instrument,” describes a fixed mindset of voice that I have encountered many times on my vocal journey. Whereas young kids learning soccer were expected to need many hours of training before they could be expected to score a goal, freestyle virtuously, or even trap the ball, from the very start, singing in key, developing range, singing in style, or gaining vocal power were linked to words such *talent*, *naturalness*, *stardom*, or *authenticity*. In other words, I was faced early on with what Demorest (2017) calls a strong “talent-mindset,” and I grew up believing that you either are a singer or you are not—and, moreover, that you are born into being a specific type of singer. According to Meizel (2020), this is a common way of thinking in Western discourse, where the voice is repeatedly described as “a static possession, as if it was only suited to one fixed repertoire or context (‘she has an operatic voice’ or ‘she has a country voice’)” (p. 2).

I first encountered the second statement as a young piano player: “If you continue to play *Rondo alla Turca* (Turkish March) like that, Mozart will turn in his grave.” This also haunted me for years: the idea that when it comes to musical works, there is a certain inherent truth to be reproduced and a standard—even for rehearsing music—that is so high, it will make the dead “come alive” (I even started writing music myself to avoid the wrath of dead composers).<sup>3</sup> Both statements, however, and the beliefs they had inculcated in me, were sharply challenged when I encountered Complete Vocal Technique (hereinafter CVT) in 2008. An important part of CVT’s philosophy and pedagogies is the *separation of taste and technique* (Sadolin, 2021). CVT regards the teacher’s tastes as unimportant, and asserts that the role of a voice teacher is to help singers achieve their desired way of singing, in a healthy manner. The teacher may offer aesthetic evaluations and valuations when asked; still, the singers are the ones doing the artistic valuation—in other words, the *tasting*—involved in vocal practices and performances.

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3 See McCormick (2015) on the agency of dead musicians.

When I entered the CVT community, I was a classically trained singer and voice teacher from what was then known as the Rogaland Conservatoire of Music (now the University of Stavanger). However, what I secretly wanted was to sound like a dark, daring, passionate cabaret act. Encountering CVT for the first time, I learned and experienced that by narrowing my vocal tract, altering my vowels slightly, raising my larynx, and adding a twist of distortion—vibrations made by the false vocal folds (Aaen et al., 2020)—I could sing a murder ballad in a scarier, more speechlike—and thus, hopefully—more *believable* manner. My first encounter with CVT was also the first time in a vocal educational setting where I was asked questions such as: What do *you* want? What can I help you do for *your* voice today? Is this the sound *you* desire? Such questions introduced me to a more open mindset of vocal practices and of the nature of the voice; this is a mindset in line with Meizel (2020), arguing that “the realities of singing in the post-postcolonial, continuously globalizing, continuously commodifying 21<sup>st</sup> century may allow for—even require—movement and the plasticity to cross boundaries” (p. 2).

As this story also illuminates, I—like many of my voice colleagues in musical theatre—have undergone a univore-to-omnivore turn myself. Currently, six out of nine voice teachers teaching at the Kristiania University College’s Bachelor in Musical Theatre, share a classical background. The other three are not trained specifically in musical theatre, either, but rather have a background in popular music—a tendency appears to be a common one in musical theatre education worldwide. For example, in the US, LoVetri and Weekly (2003) distributed a survey to voice teachers across the country, scrutinizing the teachers’ training and performance experience. Of the 139 participants, 124 (89%) stated that they primarily taught musical theatre singing, but only 20% had training and professional experience within musical theatre. This tendency is changing; however, teaching musical theatre voice is still commonly a result of “on-the-job” training and not necessarily of formal education—an argument explored in this thesis’s fourth article.

My love for musical theatre is immense. For me, musical theatre is total theatre; it comes alive as a full sensory experience—spoken words, musical vibrations, moving bodies, lights, costumes, props, visual spectacles—the art form fills me with a ceaseless sense of awe. In musical theatre, I am always together with others—real or fictive—on and off stage; together we create a mutual musical and theatrical heartbeat. So many elements can go wrong in and within a musical theatre production. But when it works, it works. And I love it.

## 1.4 On the spelling of musical theatre and the implementation of significant terms

When operating within an academic context, the spelling and the definition of *musical theatre* is an ongoing discussion. In everyday life, the term *theater* mostly refers to the physical building; on the other hand, *theatre* is used to describe the art form. By adopting US English conventions in this thesis, the correct spelling would be “music *theater*” or “musical *theater*.” Nonetheless, I have chosen to use *musical theatre* throughout, as used in the spelling of the journal *Studies in Musical Theatre* or *The Norwegian College of Musical Theatre*. In direct quotations, the author’s preferred spelling—of musical theatre or of any other significant term—will be used.

In this thesis, musical theatre is defined as an art form that comprises singing, acting, and visual spectacles, mostly combined with dance (Taylor, 2012). As a noun, *a musical* is implemented to a specific musical theatre work. When not otherwise specified, musical theatre is further understood as, and limited to, the performance of staged musicals. Therefore, I do not include more avant-garde versions of musical theatre, nor other combinations of music and theatre, such as opera. The term *contemporary* is used to describe what is “happening right now” (Flynn, 2022b), and specifically indicates musical theatre works written after the millennial turn or else means that they have been performed on Broadway—or beyond—during the last two and a half decades. The terms *American musical* and *Broadway musical* will be used interchangeably to define musicals of American origin.

The art form of musical theatre is further defined as comprising various musical genres stemming from the larger art form of *music*. As Flynn argues, “there is no one sound that defines musical theatre. There are enough musical genres represented in the musical theatre canon that it would be impossible to define Broadway as a singular musical genre or sound” (2022b, p. 45). In contemporary musical theatre, multiple genres and sub-genres are even seen to live with the same show (Edwards & Hoch, 2018). Generally speaking, the term *musical genre*—such as pop or rock—serves to group together kindred families of music. On the one hand, this categorization is made based on shared cultural traditions and musical conventions, such as a similar use of scales, rhythms, harmonies, forms, moods, or instrumentations. On the other hand, such categorizations are often based on non-musical components as well, such as elements of “nationality, class, race, gender or sexuality” (Brackett, 2019, p. 4). Although they are therefore an orchestrated human taxonomy, genres nevertheless are regarded as an efficient way for musicians, the musical industry, radio stations, bookers, audiences, and—not least of all—researchers to organize themselves and the content they work with (Morris, 2018). Nonetheless, in writing this, I acknowledge that when it comes to labeling genres and

their various sub-categorizations, their boundaries, performance patterns, and practices are fluid, complex, and constantly negotiated (see more on this in Article 3, and in chapter six). Genres may therefore emerge, evolve, and even sometimes disappear (Savage & Gayo, 2011; Vlegels & Lievens, 2017).

Because a musical genre may also consist of various (sub-)styles, the term *musical style* or *vocal style* is invoked to describe a somewhat coherent set of performance practices found within a genre. In this regard, I take on board that when a musical is labeled a pop or rock musical, it might be more precisely seen and described as written *in the style* of pop or rock, as it commonly absorbs only enough elements from a musical genre to make it recognizable as such, but without including all elements a genre might obtain—be they its significant performers, fans, way of life, or presentational mode. The term *idiom* is invoked to break down a style and is used to denote specific musical traits, be they elements of phrasings, dynamics, or—with regards to voice—the use of excess vocal effects or specific sound qualities (Fisher et al., 2019). *Vocal idioms*, more specifically, are mainly elements learned and transmitted through sonic information and not annotated in the written score (Taylor, 2012). Within musical theatre, this sonic information is typically made accessible in a show's (original) cast recording—an important aspect of musical theatre voice that will be explored in the second article of this thesis.

When writing about genres and styles within the context of singing, the term *non-classical* is typically invoked to describe performers singing, for example, jazz, pop, blues, soul, country, folk, or rock (Björkner, 2006). Finding a bracket term that does not denote or reinforce a strong historical dichotomy between classical singing and “everything else” has been a long-ongoing project within academic contexts. In the US, the term *contemporary commercial music* (CCM) is commonly used, also within musical theatre. The term was coined as a statement arguing that there is more than one way to use the vocal tract in singing (LoVetri, 2002). The term also plays on the ways such genres supposedly are founded and produced: for a large market, intended for commerce, and viewed in terms of profit (Edwards & Hoch, 2018). Edwards and Hoch (2018) argue that dividing voice training into *amplified* versus *unamplified singing* may be a more fruitful division. Within a Norwegian context, the term *rhythmic music* (rytmisk musikk) is commonly used to highlight the differences in performance practices between classical and non-classical music (see, e.g., Dyndahl et al., 2017). However, within this thesis, I have chosen to use the term *popular musics*. I include jazz in this bracket, despite arguments that this genre is not primarily occupied with commerce and profits, nor designed for a large market (associations the term “popular music” also connotes.)

The term *voice teacher* is implemented to describe those in the role of teaching singing. In Norway, the term *vocal pedagogue* (vokalpedagog) is often used; more recently, the term *vocal coach* is becoming common as well. In a US context, the term “vocal coach” customarily describes someone responsible for teaching style, whereas the voice teacher would take care of the singer’s development of vocal technique (LoVetri, 2007). In my work, I am usually involved in teaching both.

Even though this is a thesis of the sung, I have chosen to use the term *performers* to describe those singing on a musical theatre stage. Most musical theatre performers consider themselves so-called “triple threats”—mastering the art of singing, acting, and dancing—and will seldom refer to themselves purely as singers. Such naming is seen in the newly published book *So you want to sing musical theatre: A guide for performers* (Flynn, 2022b), a project by the American National Association of Teachers of Singing. Furthermore, using the term “performers” will be a reminder that even though I am zooming in on vocal practices, such a narrowing will always be artificial within musical theatre, because the use of the voice can never be separated from other actions at hand, be they acting or dancing. To describe a larger group of performers cast in a musical, I will use the words *performers*, *cast*, *company*, or *ensemble* synonymously.

The term *vocal demands* (Freeman et al., 2015) is used to describe the numerous and highly demanding requirements that we add to our vocal apparatus derived from an external context. The term *vocal behaviors* (Kayes, 2015) is, in comparison, applied to describe how we physiologically use our vocal apparatus to—intentionally or unintentionally—fulfill and operationalize various vocal demands or desires. Thus, vocal behaviors are not synonymous with the term *vocal technique*, which in this work is defined as a targeted vocal doing to create a specific automatic vocal behavior. Having a “good vocal technique” is consequently defined as a beneficial, routinized bodily doing, ensuring that a vocal behavior or a vocal aesthetic is performed in a sustainable way. Finally, the term *vocal aesthetic* is implemented as an umbrella term to describe the audible form of a vocal style with its sets of particular idioms, performance practices, and vocal-musical conventions.

## 1.5 On the structure of this thesis

This thesis is a so-called “PhD by publication” that consists of seven chapters and four published articles. Although the articles are presented only with short summaries in this extended summary, they are main components of the thesis. This extended summary is, therefore: 1)

an extended reading of the four articles, and 2) a way of putting forward comprehensive information and discussions about their becomings, implications, and meanings.

This first introductory chapter (*chapter one*) aims to frame the thesis and present a wonderment statement as well as a problem statement as the thesis' point of departure. Furthermore, the chapter puts forward the work's guiding research questions and the motivation for undertaking such a study. In addition, this first chapter defines the usages of numerous relevant terms. *Chapter two* concerns the context of this PhD thesis and its relation to previous research on musical theatre and musical theatre voice. *Chapter three* will accentuate and explore the thesis's conceptual and theoretical framework, which consists of writings on Peterson's cultural omnivorousness and Hennion's pragmatics of taste. The chapter will further lay the ground for the thesis's main theoretical contribution: the concept of the omnivorous voice. *Chapter four* contemplates the thesis's methodological, ontological, epistemological, and ethical elements; it will also contemplate the validity and credibility of the thesis. *Chapter five* presents short summaries of the four published articles. *Chapter six* will discuss results and claims made by the four articles and aims to tie the articles' explorations to the thesis's overall research questions, problem statement, and wonderment area. Finally, *chapter seven* will present some concluding remarks and argue for this thesis's contributions to the fields of music education, cultural sociology, musicology, and voice studies.

## 2 The context of this thesis and its relation to previous research

### 2.1 Musical theatre as an academic field

Until recently, studies of musical theatre have been absent from academic departments. This absence was often justified by the argument that the art form is too ephemeral, too commercial, and not serious enough to warrant scholarly scrutiny or archival preservation (Wollman, 2021). The art form has also been scorned for being “a little too gay, too popular, too Jewish, and too much damned fun” (Savran, 2004, p. 216). “Where there is pleasure, there is always the threat of shame,” argue Johnson et al. (2019, p. 46), suggesting that it is the pleasure of the musical that has rendered it a subject “unworthy” of academic research: “apparently when something feels too good, it can’t be entirely good for you” (p. 46). Consequently, within popular musical fields, musical theatre is considered to be the “wrong kind of popular music” (Johnson et al., 2019, p. 32). Those within theatre studies have, however, often kept their distance from musical theatre due to anxieties about the art form’s interdisciplinary character and taxonomic difficulties, for analysis of musicals “requires an implicit or explicit theorization of multiple (and often conflicting) systems of signification as well as at least passing familiarity with musicology and dance scholarship” (Savran, 2004, p. 215).

Consequently, today musical theatre studies are commonly found on the fringes of various scholarly discussions. Still, since the beginning of the 1990s, the art form has evolved from a solely artistic field into an academic interest. In the US, universities offer courses on composers, sub-genres, and history in a wide range of departments, such as musicology, theatre, literature, film, or media studies (Knapp et al., 2018b). In the UK, Millie Taylor became the first scholar to earn a PhD in musical theatre upon graduating from the University of Exeter in 2001, and in 2007, the first academic periodical devoted to the genre, *Studies in Musical Theatre*, was founded by Dominic Symonds and Georg Burrows (Wollman, 2021). Taylor, together with Symonds and others, has made significant contributions to the affordances and investigations of musical theatre, allowing for pleasure and passion to be combined with so-called “serious” scholarly scrutiny (see, e.g., Taylor, 2012; Symonds & Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Symonds, 2014).

Research on the pluralities of musical styles, forms, and contents within musical theatre is commonly conducted within the field of musicology (see Banfield, 1993; Block, 1997; Gordon et al., 2016; Knapp, 2005; Mordden, 2013; Naden, 2011; Nisbet, 2014). For example, *An Oxford handbook of musical theatre* (Knapp et al., 2018a, 2018b; 2018c) offers a comprehensive overview



of musical theatre's musical components, regarding the art form as a paradox when it comes to its plural roots, status as art and entertainment, and its numerous contemporary (musical) forms. For this thesis, the following chapters of *An Oxford handbook* have been of particular relevance: *Musical styles and song conventions* (Laird, 2018), *Singing* (Morris & Knapp, 2018), *The evolution of the original cast album* (Reddick, 2018), and *Orchestration and arrangement: Creating the Broadway sound* (Symonds, 2018), as these chapters also focus on performance practices in addition to the written musical theatre work. Also important for the scope of this thesis has been Wollman (2017), exploring and emphasizing the American stage musical as an ever-adapting commercial entertainment form, constantly and endlessly shifting with social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances. Here, Wollman argues that the art form continuously re-invents itself to fit the demands of an ever-changing audience, and her book *A critical companion to the American stage musical* focuses on commercial, artistic, and cultural events that have influenced the Broadway musical (see also Sternfeld and Wollman (2020) and their anthology *The Routledge companion to the contemporary musical*).

## 2.2 Researching musical theatre beyond Broadway

Even though Norway and other Nordic countries have long received praise for their inclusion of popular music in formal music education and research (Dyndahl et al., 2017), musical theatre appears to be missing from this equation. The first thesis written on musical theatre in Norway (within the context of a conservatoire education) came in 1981. From then to 2017, only six more (master's) theses emerged; this count includes studies of Tin Pan Alley and European cabaret songs (Dyndahl et al., 2017). Thus, in Norway, research into musical theatre within theatre studies, musicology, and performing arts pedagogies is in its infancy. As such, I find it relevant to mention that this is the first PhD thesis to emerge from Norway that focuses solely on musicals and musical theatre.

Even though this thesis explores the pluralities of musical theatre voice from my stance as a Norwegian voice teacher, the parenthetical adjective "American" is included in the thesis's title. On the one hand, this is because the American musical is a site and focus point for the thesis's exploration; on the other hand, it is a choice intended to underline Broadway's prominent position within the field of musical theatre worldwide (Chandler, 2014). Although geographically confined, Broadway in New York, home to 41 theaters is considered the pinnacle of American musical theatre and is acknowledged as "the place" for live stage entertainment (Russell, 2018). Indeed, according to Hodge (2020), "adding 'Broadway' in front of the word 'musical' instantly heightens the expectation of greatness" (p. 58). However, in recent years,

increasing academic attention is also being paid to the art form outside Broadway (or London's West End). One significant contributor to this trend is Wolf (2020), who has researched how musical theatre "beyond Broadway" converses with Broadway as an artistic center (see also Bringardner, 2018; Wolf, 2017).<sup>4</sup> The newly published *Routledge Companion to Musical Theatre* (MacDonald & Donovan, 2022) similarly investigates the nomadic side of musical theatre, focusing its work on examples from outside the Anglophone realm.

As touched upon in the prologue of this thesis, there is a strong connection between the Norwegian musical theatre scene and that of the US. This connection is most evident in the production of shows and the repertoire presented to a Norwegian audience. Second, it is visible in the curriculum and practices of higher musical theatre education. For example, in the spring of 2020, 88 students at Kristiania University College, Bachelor in Musical Theatre, performed in a total of 258 songs on their singing exams. Of these, 202 songs originated from the American musical theatre repertoire, either performed in English or translated into Norwegian. Of the remaining 56 songs, 15 came from Swedish musicals such as *Så som i Himmelen* (Kempe, 2020), *Kristina från Duvemåla* (Andersson, 2007), and *Chess* (Andersson & Ulvaeus, 2014). In addition, four songs came from *Les Misérables* (Schönberg, 1985); Andrew Lloyd Webber wrote four, and two were taken from musicals by Kurt Weill. Only four songs originated from (two) musicals composed by Norwegians: *Frendelaus* (Kverndokk, 2003), and *Oda fra Havet*.<sup>5</sup> The remaining 23 songs comprised a variety of (mostly pop) tunes with different geographical origins.

In the US, specialized education and training for musical theatre performers is well established and plentiful. The first institutional program for musical theatre was established in 1968 at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music; today there are approximately 169 undergraduate musical theatre programs in the US that offer bachelor-level degrees (Cox, 2020). By comparison, Norway—a tiny country of approximately five million people—currently offers higher musical theatre education only in its capital, Oslo, and this within three higher educational programs: 1) Bachelor in Musical Theatre at NSKI University College, 2) Bachelor in Musical Theatre at the Kristiania University College, and 3) a two-year vocational musical theatre education at Bårdar, part of Kristiania Vocational School. All of these degree programs demand a quite substantial tuition fee. By contrast, degrees in classical music, jazz, or some other popular musical styles may be obtained for free in Norway.

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4 Wolf has furthermore written several works on gender and sexuality in the American musical (see Wolf, 2002, 2011, 2018).

5 No cast recording is available for this musical by Marte Hallem.

## 2.3 Research into training the musical theatre vocal performer

Within the field of voice and vocal pedagogy, musical theatre is a wide-ranging but under-researched area of singing (Cox, 2020). The path to training and becoming a musical theatre vocal performer also varies widely: classical singers crossing over into musical theatre; trained actors or dancers who add voice to their skillset; performers who educate as specialized “triple threats”; or CCM singers (often celebrities or stars) who are cast in specific musical theatre productions. Such varying paths may lead musical theatre performers to embody various vocal identities. Melton (2007) explains: “For the actor, voice is not the main event, although it is usually a significant contributor to the event [...]. In classical singing, however, voice is nearly always the main event and in musical theatre it frequently functions as the event of the moment” (p. 214). These various paths toward becoming a musical theatre performer may also cause relevant research on the musical theatre voice to be spread across different research fields, and one might argue that the body of work written directly on musical theatre voice pedagogy is conducted by a handful of significant individuals. One example would be Roll (2014) and her thesis on the evolution of the female musical theatre belt voice. Roll (2016) follows up this work by exploring the belting voice’s implications for voice teachers, and in Roll (2019), she explores the belted voice from a singer’s perspective (see also Bremner & Roll, 2015; Roll & Goffi-Fynn, 2021). Another such individual would be Cox (2020), whose thesis, *In the room where it happens: Teaching musical theatre and contemporary commercial music (CCM) singing*, is the first of its kind within the field, exploring how voice function and style are addressed in the voice studios in universities throughout the US, combined with identifying signature pedagogies of musical theatre voice (see also Cox & Forbes, 2022).

Within musical theatre voice there is also a strong tradition of interviewing significant voice teachers to spread “best practices” and useful practice knowledge (see, e.g., Blades, 2017; Naismith, 2022). For example, Melton (2007) explores the current traits and training of musical theatre performers by interviewing well-renowned musical theatre teachers, such as Joan Lader, Wendy Leborgne, Mary Saunders-Barton and Jeanette LoVetri, on specific elements of singing—such as alignment or resonance—as well as on the changing requirements of musical theatre singing. By the same token, Benson (2020) explores the various aspects of voice training outside the western-lyrical, classical realm. This work is not oriented directly toward musical theatre voice, but still, it includes interviews with several significant musical theatre voice teachers.

Additionally, so-called “how-to manuals” have a strong position within the field (see Aquilina, 2022; Church, 2021; Flynn, 2022b; Purdy, 2016). For example, in her book *Singing and the*

actor, Kayes (2004) offers a step-by-step vocal program for the modern singing actor or singing dancer. Furthermore, together with Fisher, Kayes has authored the books *This is a voice: 99 exercises to train, project and harness the power of your voice* (Kayes & Fisher, 2018) and *Successful singing auditions* (Kayes & Fisher, 2002) (see also Fisher et al., 2019; Kayes, 2015, 2019; Kayes & Cook, 2009; Kayes & Welch, 2016 for more on Kayes's broad and significant work on voice conducted inside and outside musical theatre singing). In this category, we also find Melton and Tom's book *One voice* (2012), which integrates singing and theatre voice techniques. Its authors argue that in being an actor or singer, your voice is called upon to do many things, and they recommend pedagogical methods that may especially help to keep the voice healthy while meeting these various demands and challenges. Melton (2015) has furthermore authored the book *Dancing with voice: A collaborative journey across disciplines*, which combines aspects of training singing and dancing. In Norway, this combination has also been an interest at Kristiania University College, where Hagen et al. (2017) and Kvammen et al. (2020) are exploring the merging of song and dance with the Alexander Technique, forming new methodological inroads for training the musical theatre performer.

Moreover, research on training and learning the musical theatre voice is linked to specific academic journals. One example is the *Journal of Singing*, published by the US National Association of Teachers of Singing. The journal's frequent use of columns—for example, by its long-time editor Robert Edwin (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2018, 2020)—has arguably set the stage for contemporary musical theatre voice by focusing on the particularities of musical theatre singing and teaching. The journal *Voice and Speech Review* is also relevant in this regard, offering a strong body of musical theatre voice work (see, e.g., Accetta, 2022; Cabral, 2022; Cook, 2005; Dargin, 2017; Kayes & Cook, 2009; Manternach et al., 2021; Mohammed, 2022; Moore, 2017; von Germeten, 2021; Weiss, 2020). Almost entirely absent, however, are works on musical theatre voice published within music education research journals. This thesis's third article stands out as an exception in this regard.

## 2.4 Research on the human voice and its labelings

With such exceptions as for illness and disability, all performers—or all humans—inhabit the same vocal anatomy and are able to alter the different parts of their vocal apparatus—be they their vocal fold vibrational patterns, their sub-glottal air pressure, or their vocal tract configuration—to create different and desired vocal outcomes (Edgerton, 2014; Eidsheim, 2019; Kayes, 2015; Aaen et al., 2021a). Howard argues, “The voice is an instrument and we learn how to play it” (2007, p. 9). In this case, the human voice is one of the most versatile

musical instruments of all, ranging as high as 80db in intensity, up to four or five octaves in fundamental frequency, and offers a broad range of so-called *timbres* or *sound qualities* (Kob et al., 2011). All formal voice training, in some way or the other, ultimately aims to modify the physiological behaviors of the vocal apparatus to produce a desired—and hopefully sustainable—vocal production or outcome of sounds (LoVetri, 2002). However, the labeling of these sounds and the terminology used to categorize them are neither straightforward nor unanimously implemented throughout the vocal scene (Melton, 2007). Language difference between singing pedagogy and voice science is one factor adding to such discussions; singing teachers drawing on their personal experiences, and creating different branches of hegemonic oral cultures, is another (Harrison & O’Byran, 2014).

In recent decades, private singing schools that profess to cover every sound the human voice can make are becoming more established, including within musical theatre. For example, Somatic Voicework™ was developed by Jeanette LoVetri (as featured in Hoch, 2018; White, 2017; Woodruff, 2011) to address the conflicting requirements of the vast array of musical styles today’s singers and teachers must attend to (Lo Vetri, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2014; Lo Vetri et al., 2021). In the US, the Estill Voice Model™ is highly established (see, e.g., Accetta, 2022; Benson, 2017, 2018; Benson et al., 2020; Estill, 1996), and within a European realm, Complete Vocal Technique (McGlashan et al., 2017; Sadolin, 2021; Theusen et al., 2017; Aaen et al., 2021a, 2021b; Aaen et al., 2019; Aaen et al., 2020; Aaen et al., 2021; Aaen et al., 2022) is strongly on the rise. Many of these influential vocal methodologies are trademarked entities that contain a specific terminology, commonly trademarked as well (Hoch, 2018).

Today, contemporary voice research is directed mainly toward the biomechanical or acoustic sides of the vocal apparatus in close dialogue with voice science. Such research is undertaken with an intention of securing vocal health and effective vocal teaching (see, e.g., Björkner, 2008; Bourne et al., 2011; Echternach et al., 2014; Aaen et al., 2020). Up to some decades ago, most such scientific investigations were devoted only to classical or operatic singing (Björkner, 2006). This tendency mirrors what Edwin (2005) identifies as a widespread mantra in today’s broad field of singing: that if you learn to sing classically, you can sing everything. Edwin compares such an idea to a tennis instructor arguing that if you learn how to play tennis, you can play any sport. However, long-standing beliefs that classical training and aesthetics are superior to other styles are declining (Edwin, 2007; Potter, 1998), allowing popular music to garner higher research interest levels within voice science (see, e.g., Björkner, 2006; Bretl et al., 2022; Echternach et al., 2014; Hoch, 2018; Kayes, 2015; Leppävuori et al., 2021; McGlashan et al., 2017; Stephens & Wyon, 2020; Aaen et al., 2020; Aaen et al., 2022).

Writing about voice, vocal behaviors, vocal mechanisms, and vocal technique is, however, a tricky matter. First of all, our knowledge and understandings of—and consequently, our abilities to solve—the many puzzles of the voice are continuously evolving. Second, writing about sounds is always extracted from one’s capacity to hear these sounds with their subtle variations in question. Still, to explain how the human voice works in relatively simple terms, the Power-Source-Filter model is often implemented. This model asserts that the human vocal mechanism consists of: 1) a power source (the respiratory system), 2) a sound source (mostly the vocal folds),<sup>6</sup> and 3) an acoustic filter (the vocal tract) (Kayes, 2015). In brief, the airflow from the lungs generates aerodynamic power for oscillating the vocal folds, supplying the voice with energy, thus creating a buzzing-sound that is known as the *fundamental frequency* or the basic waveform of a vocal sound (Kayes, 2015, 2019). This fundamental frequency is further transformed and amplified by the acoustic characteristics and shapes of the vocal tract, enhancing or suppressing a variety of overtones, sometimes known as *partial harmonics* or *formants* (Kayes, 2015, 2019). Even though the Power-Source-Filter model is most often presented linearly, I argue that the model should not be limited to such interpretations. For example, the perception of overtones is inextricably connected to a voice’s vocal fold phonation, and vocal fold activity is adjusted and impacted by the formations of the vocal tract. Moreover, the vocal folds’ vibration patterns are seen impacting and adjusting the airflow and air pressure of the respiratory system.

## 2.5 Research on training the voice across genres

In 2014, Green et al., studied the vocal styles required to audition for professional work—including Broadway shows, off-Broadway, national tours, and cruise ships—reporting that 55% of all opportunities advertised were in the style of pop/rock. By comparison, only 5% of the jobs being offered were within so-called legit signing techniques. Thus, the article concluded with the need for new singing styles to be studied and integrated into contemporary voice training. Research into training musical theatre voice within and across various vocal-musical styles is commonly conducted under the umbrella term *cross-training*. Here, “cross-training” is defined as a training process that cultivates singers to alternate healthily between mostly popular and more operatic music (Sun, 2022; Wilson, 2021). The goal of cross-training is to develop laryngeal flexibility (LoVetri et al., 2014) and, for many, the term has been considered a welcome replacement for the term *cross-over* because the latter suggests “that a singer is

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6 Other moveable parts of the vocal tract may also act as oscillators, such as in the vocal effect *growl*—defined as vibrations made by the arytenoid cartilages “drumming” on the epiglottis (Aaen et al., 2020)—or *distortion*, a vocal effect created by vibrations of the false vocal cords (Aaen et al., 2020).

merely visiting a repertoire rather than inhabiting it” (Greschner, 2019, p. 503). For example, as argued—quite stringently—by Spivey and Saunders-Barton (2018), “for some of us it [the term cross-over] has come to imply inauthentic style, a kind of artistic betrayal” (p. 22).

In 2018, the US National Association of Teaching offered its first session on cross-training the singing voice, informing its attendees that “this is a presentation for the studio teacher who needs strategies—and maybe also needs permission—to work in a way that appeals to their diverse interest, their vocal well-being, and the current market” (Spivey & Saunders-Barton, 2018, p. 2). Focusing on cross-training and the musical theatre voice, Edwin (2008) advocates that cross-training the voice promotes optimal performance levels and mitigates vocal injury, as a “variety of phonation, resonance, and articulation exercises can help any singer develop a healthy total voice workout” (p. 74) (see also Rosenberg, 2016).

Cross-training is often contemplated in combination with so-called *functional voice training* (see, e.g., Bartlett, 2020; Edwin, 2008; Greschner, 2019; LeBorgne & Rosenberg, 2021; Lister, 2013; Spivey & Saunders-Barton, 2018; Sun, 2022; Vala, 2021). Benson (2018) follows such a train of thought, arguing that plural elements of vocal technique may be trained independently of musical styles, such as vibrato, posture, alignment, onsets, agility, and registration. Thus, rather than running independent tracks of vocal study in classical, musical theatre, and popular music singing, cross-training and functional voice training can be consolidated for improved efficiency and camaraderie in the voice studio (see also B. Johnson, 2017 and Holley, 2016 for studies on cross-training the musical theatre voice with regards to concrete cases).

## 2.6 On the vocal language implemented in this thesis

In this thesis, a vocal language of terms and categorizations from the previously described Complete Vocal Technique (CVT) is implemented (see, e.g., McGlashan et al., 2017; Sadolin, 2021; Theusen et al., 2017; Aaen et al., 2021a, 2021b; Aaen et al., 2019; Aaen et al., 2020; Aaen et al., 2021). Developed by Danish singer, voice teacher, and researcher Cathrine Sadolin, CVT is a systematic vocal pedagogy framework that forms the basis for the teaching at the school Complete Vocal Institute in Copenhagen. In CVT, vocal technique is seen as divisible into bricks and pieces (see illustration 1. *An overview of Complete Vocal Technique*), combinable to your or others’ aesthetic likings. Thus, the technique may enable singers or voice teachers to identify and perform different vocal behaviors in various situated performances by “designing” precisely the sounds they want. Furthermore, the framework will enable one to pinpoint specific vocal challenges and focus directly on the parts of the technique a singer

would like to develop. This is, as each term implemented is connected to one specific sound attribute (Sadolin, 2021).

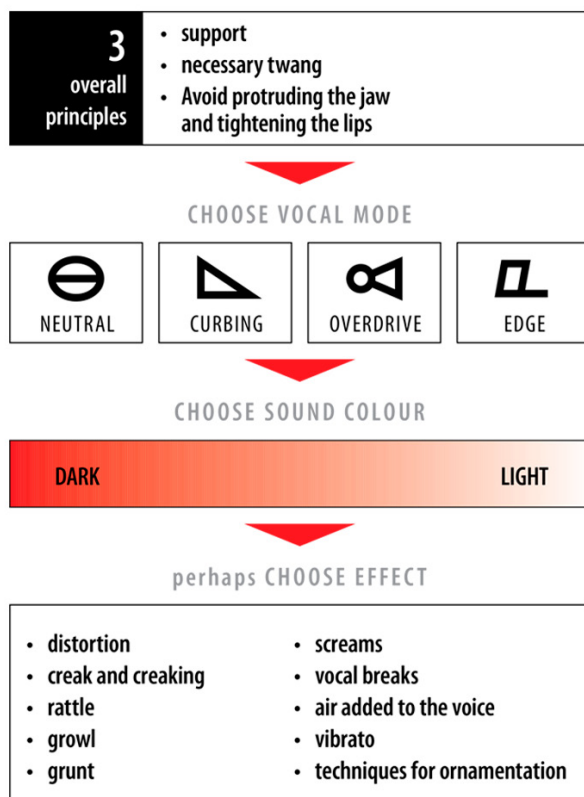


Illustration 1: An overview of Complete Vocal Technique. Printed with courtesy from Shout Production.

On the first level of the overview, we see what labels CVT gives to the overall principles of singing: *support*, *necessary twang*, and *avoiding protruding the jaw and tightening the lips*. These three elements are defined as the fundamental conditions vocal production must abide by to sing in a healthy way regardless of style. In short, within CVT, support is defined as holding back the breath to control the airflow and the air pressure, in other words, support is working against the natural urge of the diaphragm to quickly release the air that has been inhaled (Sadolin, 2021). “Twang” is defined as a narrowing of the epiglottic funnel between the petiole and the arytenoid complex, whereby the sound becomes clearer and nonbreathy, and the volume potentially increases (Sadolin, 2021). The amount of twang may vary from *necessary* to *distinct*; necessary twang is the degree of twang you need to achieve an easy and



unhindered use of the voice regardless of vocal mode, sound color, or effect chosen. Distinct twang, however, is distinctly heard in the vocal mode of Edge, adding to the mode's somewhat "sharp" or "screamy" character (McGlashan et al., 2017; Sadolin, 2021).

On level two of the overview, we find the four vocal modes. CVT identifies, defines, and teaches four modes of singing: *Neutral*, *Curbing*, *Overdrive*, and *Edge*—categorizations based on audio perception, laryngostroboscopic imaging, acoustics, long-time-average spectrum, and EGG (Sadolin, 2021; Aaen et al., 2019). The vocal modes Overdrive and Edge imply a dominant second harmonic and progressive constriction of supraglottic structures, defining and making them audible recognizable as what CVT labels *metallic* (Aaen et al., 2017). Neutral is the only vocal mode labeled as non-metallic and where it is possible to add audible air to the vocal sound (Aaen et al., 2021). Curbing is regarded as the "vocal mode in between" and is characterized as being slightly plaintive, lidded, held-back, or restrained, and further reduced in its metallic character and in the density of sound. In so-called *reduced density*, an elongation of the vocal folds is observed as an accomplishment of the "thyroid cartilage tilting forward, stretching of the mucosa covering the cricoid-arytenoid complex and the posterior cricoid, and an upward posterior, slightly superior, contraction of the middle constrictor muscle in the pharyngeal wall" (Aaen et al., 2019, 806.e09).

On the third level of the overview, we find the use of sound color. Sound color within CVT is linked to an acoustic principle that a larger vocal tract creates a "darker" sound and a smaller vocal tract lighter (Sadolin, 2021; Kayes, 2015). The position of the larynx, the amount of twang, the closing/opening of the nasal passage, the shape of the mouth opening, the position and shape of the tongue, and the raising/relaxing of the soft palate will all alter the size of the vocal tract and thereby impact the sound color (Sadolin, 2021). On the fourth and final level of the overview, we find the potential vocal effects. CVT identifies, defines, and teaches vocal effects, such as *distortion*, *rattle*, *growl*, *grunt*, *creak*, *creaking*, *air added to the voice*, *screams*, *vocal breaks*, *vibrato*, and *ornamentation* techniques, each formed by various supraglottic structures, most of which do not interfere with the vibratory pattern of the vocal folds (Aaen et al., 2020). These vocal effects may be sung and taught in combination as well to achieve complex sounds and noises.

Most often, when it comes to characterizations of the human voice, the term *timbre*—"the attribute that causes a listener to hear dissimilarity between two tones of the same loudness and pitch" (Erickson & Phillips 2020, p. 231)—or the terms *voice quality* or *vocal quality* (Bourne & Kenny, 2015) are used to define a specific vocal outcome. Within CVT, "timbre" is considered a perceptual artifact defined by many technical attributes, such as the choice of vocal mode, the amount of metallic character heard in the sound, the amount of density in

the note, the chosen sound color, and the natural size of the larynx and the vocal tract (Aaen et al., 2021a). The terms “voice quality” or “vocal quality” are also not used within CVT but would arguably also be considered terms describing the vocal outcome of various technical attributes, such as amount of metallic character, degree of density, volume, vocal mode, and added vocal effects.

One consequence of implementing the CVT vocal vocabulary in this thesis is that I will not use long-standing musical theatre voice terms such as *legit*, *mix*, or *belt* to describe specific vocal technical behaviors. Linking back to the organization of vocal technique within CVT, these terms are seen as excessively broad vocal categories consisting of other, smaller technical and behavioral bricks and pieces considered more efficient and fruitful to consider. This logic is backed up by research conducted outside CVT’s realm as well. For example, Echternach et al. (2014), researching vocal tract shapes in different styles of musical theatre singing, argues that in voice pedagogy and voice science, there is no consensus on how the singular voice quality of “belting” can be defined. Flynn et al. (2018) follow such an argument, offering an acoustic comparison of lower and higher belt ranges in professional female musical theatre performers performing on Broadway (see also Flynn, 2022b). Nonetheless, the terms “legit,” “mix,” or “belt” are seen implemented in my writings in a *stylistic* or *musical* kind of way, as I acknowledge that such terms are commonly used within the musical theatre profession. In this case, *legit singing* or *legit vocal technique* is regarded as singing developed out of the operetta tradition, integrating elements of classical vocal technique and sound ideals into the practice. Such elements include a seamless transition between vocal registers, the maintenance of a consistent acoustic resonance, even legato lines, modified vowels, and often an intensified use of vibrato (see, e.g., Kayes, 2015).

The term belt describes singing notes by “hitting them hard” (LoVetri et al., 2014, p. 55), and belting is commonly conceived of as intense sounds, often high in volume and most often sung in a high pitch range (Fisher et al., 2019). Furthermore, belt is perceived as a speech-like voice quality and referred to as “having a strong ring to it,” as in “brassy” and/or “twangy” sounds (Kayes, 2015; LoVetri et al., 2014) (for further writings on belting, see also Bittencourt et al., 2021; Bonin, 2020, 2021; Lister, 2013; LoVetri et al., 2021; McGlashan et al., 2017; Popeil, 2007). “Mixed voice,” however, is used to describe a sound that is audibly lying somewhere between legit and belt, “leaning towards” the one or the other, where the clarity of vowels is commonly preserved (LoVetri et al., 2014). Voice production strategies are thereby audibly perceived as either TA or CT muscle activity-dominant (Aaen et al. 2019). However, as with the two other terms, voice research is sparse when it comes to offering a concrete and singular definition of the mixed voice, and a critique is posited against its use,

arguing that vocal mechanisms cannot be mixed, because patterns of vocal fold vibration are mutually exclusive (Fisher et al., 2019).

## 2.7 Researching the musical theatre voice's social side

As stated in the introduction, the social side of the voice in general, and within musical theatre in particular, is an underexplored territory. This is, however, a statement with important exceptions, which this section aims to cover. For example, Macpherson (2020) argues that in the last half-century, musical theatre has fully embraced technology to keep up with audience expectations of recorded sounds and televisual media in popular culture. Macpherson explores how this implementation of microphones impacts the performance aesthetics of musical theatre, opening for vocal outputs previously impossible to implement on a big theater stage, resulting in four categories of voices to be performed in contemporary musical theatre today: 1) the *Rock Voice*, as heard in shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Lloyd Webber, 2000), or *Rent* (Larson, 1999); 2) the *Poperetta Voice*, as found in *Les Misérables* (Schönberg, 2020) or *Phantom of the Opera* (Lloyd Webber, 2011); 3) the *New Broadway Voice*, as used in *Book of Mormon* (Parker et al., 2011) or *Chorus Line* (Hamlisch, 2006); and 4) the *Verismo Voice*, as showcased in shows such as *Next to Normal* (Kitt, 2009) or *Once* (Hansard & Irglová, 2012). Macpherson concludes that (musical theatre) voices are responsive, animate, and dynamic—and thus, a site for multiple encodings to be negotiated or understood.

Similarly, Johnson (2019) argues that with the establishment of Broadway as an economic cornerstone and tourist destination, and with the rise of the mega-musical in the 1980s and 1990s, the vocal sound of Broadway musicals has been re-designed. According to Johnson, this re-design has led to an increased use of belting, a severely stylized diction, the use of microphones even in small theaters and an audience expectation of hearing live what they have heard on the cast recording. Johnson (2019) calls this particular vocal aesthetic the *Broadway sound* (these thoughts are further explored in chapter six, where I discuss a “musicalification” of voice in musical theatre). Asare (2020a), furthermore, scrutinizes who is included in such a Broadway sound or sameness, naming it a “marker of Whiteness” (p. 358), arguing that Black Broadway performers face a unique vocal demand, grappling with the conundrum of sounding “Black enough.”

Although not oriented directly at voice in musical theatre, but still highly important for the scope of this thesis, Eidsheim (2019) also explores racial expectations and applied meanings of vocal sounds. In her book, *The sound of race: Listening, timbre, and vocality in African*

*American music*, she argues that a voice is not singular but collective in its nature; not innate, but cultural. Furthermore, Eidsheim argues that a voice's source is not the singer but the listener (see also Eidsheim, 2015). This thesis shares such a voice view, which it aims to spotlight and explore throughout. In a similar manner, in the book *Multivocality: Singing on the borders of identity*, Meizel (2020) describes vocality as fluid, constructed, and continually reconstructed. Meizel focuses her work on singers in vocal motion across genre and gender boundaries as well as cultural borders, and between body and technology, arguing that even the most iconic singers do not exercise a merely static voice throughout their careers.

Despite the close positioning of my work with the above-mentioned scholars in this section, this thesis—and the concept of the omnivorous voice—also departs from such research by highlighting and opening an overarching discussion about the role of taste in artistic processes and in the formation of vocal styles, vocal aesthetics, and vocal behaviors. Additionally, this thesis is written from my perspective as a voice teacher, aiming to create knowledge from practice for practice. Thus, its framework and ideas are continuously developed, contemplated, and tested in dialogue with teaching or learning the art of musical theatre voice. Likewise, the theory implemented—be it theory explored or developed—is intended to be relevant to the practices and life within voice studios as well and aims to anchor itself in accordance with contemporary studies on vocal anatomy and physiology.

### **3 Theoretical framework(s): Cultural omnivorousness and the pragmatics of tastes**

Two theoretical or analytical lenses inform and form the scope of this thesis. The first is the concept and framework of *cultural omnivorousness*, as coined by American sociologist Richard Peterson (Peterson, 1992, 2005; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992; Rossman & Peterson, 2015). The second is the writings of French sociologist Antoine Hennion and his *pragmatics of taste* (Hennion, 2003, 2004, 2007; Teil & Hennion, 2018). It has been argued that an overarching aspect of cultural sociology is “how people live together” (Wright, 2015, p. 18), and the concept of *taste* has become one of that field’s core elements when examining such human coexistence (Arsel and Bean, 2018). “Questions of value matter,” writes Stewart (2014, p. 106), stating that no side of our society is freed of this notion. “Taste operates behind the scenes [...] [it] determines what is left behind, what gets scoured away, and what gets picked up and used again,” Bean similarly concludes (2018, p. 47).

Within musical theatre voice, I argue that the role of taste is frequently relegated to the backseat of a car being driven by other strong values, such as ideas of an industry standard of vocal sounds or as a strong loyalty to a show’s sonic performance history (see Article 2). A more personal understanding of taste is thus consigned to other types of popular music where new or unusual vocal sounds are more openly considered as the key to commercial success—and voice teachers, therefore, must acknowledge and “focus on the taste and desires of the performer in front of them” (Edwards & Hoch, 2018, p. 188). In this thesis, taste in musical theatre is not banished to work from behind the scenes, but is instead brought upon the main stage to explore its workings on and with the voice. In this chapter, I first individually present the two theoretical lenses on omnivorousness and taste. Next, I discuss the combination of the two lenses while considering their significant differences. Finally, the two lenses are integrated into a framework for the thesis’s main theoretical contribution: the concept of the omnivorous voice itself.

#### **3.1 Peterson’s cultural omnivore and the tasting heritage of Bourdieu**

Throughout history, taste has evolved from a metaphor for a bodily capacity and necessity to a metaphor for the mind and for processes of perception and aesthetic valuations (Vercelloni, 2016). In recent decades, taste is most often researched as a phenomenon within cultural consumption, synonymous with choices and preferences for symbolic goods (Wright, 2019),

(see, e.g., Arsel & Bean, 2018; Bennett et al., 2008; Wright, 2015). Within music, taste is thus explored mostly with regard to audiences, fans, and listeners' taste patterns (see, e.g., Nault et al., 2021; Vlegels & Lievens, 2017). Such research is arguably highly influenced by the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and his book *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste* (Bourdieu, 1984). Here, Bourdieu presents his argument for how the game of culture and a quest for cultural capital is played out through the exhibition of tastes.<sup>7</sup> He further contends that a synonymous—*homologous*—relationship exists between taste and social class, linking taste to distinction and—implicitly—also to inequality:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6)

Bourdieu did not write extensively about music; still, he has been an extraordinarily influential figure in music sociology (Reay, 2015). However, when writing about music, Bourdieu claims that “nothing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class,’ nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 18). Such classifications are not defined merely as rational insights but indeed as embodied social structures or histories (Dyndahl, 2020; Stewart, 2020). Taste is thus an essential part of one’s *habitus*, defined as “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Consequently, people of similar class and social groupings may inhabit similar *habiti*, and *habitus* may take form as a practical sense of how to—or how not to—act in any particular social reality (Østerberg & Bjørnerem, 2017). Many scholars within musicology and music education follow Bourdieu’s trajectory and explore tastes and musical objects with respect to broader social dynamics and processes of inclusion and exclusion (see, e.g., Burnard et al., 2015; Cox, 2020; Dyndahl et al., 2017; Hofvander Trulsson et al., 2015; Söderman et al., 2015; Varkøy, 2015). One reason for the firm grip of structural or so-called critical views and explanations within the social sciences argues that the world’s ills are not caused by ill-natured individuals. Instead, such ills are generated by societies’ systematic workings. Thus, to make a difference, impose change or solve problems, attention must be given to structures and not to the individual (Martin & Dennis, 2016).

In his work, Bourdieu also argues against long-standing paradigms of aesthetic judgment posited by philosopher Immanuel Kant. As a consequence of Kant’s work *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/2015), taste has a long history of being defined as disinterested, where likes

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<sup>7</sup> Cultural capital is one of Bourdieu’s and cultural sociology’s pivotal concepts, defining *culture* as a mode of currency that may be exchanged, reproduced, and accumulated (Hanquinet & Savage, 2015).

and dislikes are ineffable and natural in nature based on a *common sense*; true beauty must therefore be felt by every (hu)man. Aesthetical judgments are, in other words, not generated to satisfy the body's appetites; they serve no purpose other than contemplative reflection for its own sake (Hanquinet, 2018; Pomiès & Arsel, 2018; Stewart, 2020; Wright, 2019). Bourdieu, by contrast, aims to show that taste is as much a social judgment as an aesthetical one, and he points to taste as an ability or recourse of people that is unevenly distributed in society. Moreover, Bourdieu (1984) asserts that "in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation" (p. 56). Thus, according to Bourdieu, taste takes shape as distaste, disgust, or intolerance toward the tastes of others, and not necessarily as manifestations of what one loves or of what holds groups of people together (Stewart, 2017). Consequently, in Bourdieu's trajectory the aesthetic object is scrutinized mostly or entirely in close intertwinement with social forces; furthermore, questions of aesthetics are commonly excluded and left to art philosophers or historians to explore (Hanquinet, 2018; Wright, 2019). In other words, processes of learning, feeling, experiencing, or making taste happen—the individual immediacy of the sensory experience—are not given significant attention in Bourdieu's work.

In the early 1990s, American sociologist Richard Peterson and his co-workers entered the stage of cultural sociology (Peterson, 1992, 1997, 2005; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992; Rossman & Peterson, 2015). Peterson also takes as a prerequisite of his work that there exists a symbolic capital or economy alongside a material one, and within his theory of *cultural production*, Peterson, like Bourdieu, focuses on the ways symbolic elements—in other words, culture—is shaped by the structural systems within which they are created, distributed, and valued (Peterson & Anand, 2004). However, Peterson breaks with Bourdieu's strict homology between class and taste when he coins the term cultural omnivorousness following his analysis of data from numerous audience segmentation studies in the US during the 1980s and 1990s. Here, the *cultural omnivore* and the phenomenon of *cultural omnivorousness* builds on the argument that "not only are high-status Americans far more likely than others to consume the fine arts [...] they are also more likely to be involved in a wide range of low-status activities" (Peterson & Kern, 1996, p. 900). Cultural omnivorousness thus describes a qualitative and, in many ways, an unexpected change in contemporary taste patterns and in marking elite status (Rossman & Peterson, 2015):

The view of cultural stratification that places a discriminating and exclusive elite on the top and an indiscriminating mass on the bottom is questioned. [...] it is clear that while those in the upper occupational groups are more apt to like symphonic music and to engage in elite arts activities, they are also more apt to like a number of kinds of music and engage in a wide range of non-elite activities. At the same time, those in the lowest occupational groups tend to engage in few activities and

strongly like one non-elite form of music. The results are interpreted as showing a shift from an elite-to-mass status hierarchy to an omnivore-to-univore status hierarchy. (Peterson, 1992, p. 243).

In his work, Peterson (1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996) also explores the societal reasons for the emergence of the omnivore, claiming that 1) the two world wars challenged humanistic beliefs in the moral superiority of fine culture, 2) education has replaced birth and cultural breeding as preconditions for elite status, and 3) socially mobile persons of diverse backgrounds make diverse cultural expressions accepted and respectable. In addition, a more liberal education and the mass media may have contributed to omnivorous development.

When Peterson presented his first paper on cultural omnivorousness, he claimed that “the proportion of omnivores to elitists should grow with each succeeding birth cohort” (1992, p. 255). He later disavowed this statement upon finding that, contrary to his expectation, the levels of breadth in musical taste seen in 1992 had declined by 2002 and 2008 (Rossman & Peterson, 2015). Still, Peterson’s theories about the cultural omnivore have sparked great interest in the sociology of culture, and in recent decades a multiplicity of studies have sought to question, dismiss, replicate, or elaborate on his initial findings (see, e.g., Brisson, 2019; Dyndahl et al., 2014; Hazir & Warde, 2015; Lizardo & Skiles, 2015; Ollivier, 2008; Peterson, 2005; Warde et al., 2007; Wright, 2011). Many of these discussions are centered around whether Peterson breaks with or merely expands Bourdieu’s ideas (Lizardo & Skiles, 2015; Schwarz, 2013). Ollivier (2008) argues the latter case:

Openness to cultural diversity entails neither the disappearance of cultural boundaries nor the flattering of social and artistic hierarchies [...]. Omnivores would not exist if there were no boundaries to be crossed between high and low, commercial or authentic, global or local culture [...]. What is most highly regarded, at least by many intellectuals and scholars, is the willingness and ability to choose [...] this form of agency is both recognized as desirable by, and most accessible to individuals who are positioned as central in any given field and who possesses not only large amounts but also the right kind, of material and symbolic recourses.

In other words, being omnivorous is not about the dissolution of class or a lack of discrimination toward symbolic goods and valuations; rather, Peterson argues that high-status groups appreciate, for example, musical genres in a way that reflects their personal level of education and their knowledge of the genre’s history, its prominent artists, or its relation to other genres.



Within music education—and within the context of Norway—omnivorousness is most often explored with connection to the term *musical gentrification* (Dyndahl, 2015, 2021; Dyndahl et al., 2017; Dyndahl et al., 2014; Dyndahl et al., 2021). Here, musical gentrification is defined as “complex processes with both inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes, by which musics, music practices, and music cultures of relatively lower status are made to be objects of acquisition by subjects who inhabit higher or more powerful positions” (p. 54). The concept is built on tendencies from the omnivorous framework of Peterson and Kern (1996), in which “one recurrent strategy is to define popular culture as brutish, and something to be suppressed or avoid [...] another is to gentrify elements of popular culture and incorporate them into the dominant status group culture” (p. 906). Dyndahl et al. (2017) thereby argue that “gentrification provides the necessary arenas or fields for cultural omnivorousness to be exercised [...]. In order for the omnivores to be able to consume a rich cultural diet, the gentrification processes need to infuse new produce so that this diet can in fact be provided” (p. 440). In this regard, it is worth noting that the gentrified cultural or musical objects and expressions may change or adapt in the process; they may be made more exclusive—even unaffordable to their original possessors—or they may be altered in their primary “nature” when gentrified into new forms or practices (Dyndahl, 2021; Dyndahl et al., 2014).

### 3.2 Doing tastes, or the pragmatics of tastes by Hennion

French sociologist and musicologist Antoine Hennion also speaks about tastes in their potential plural form. Taste depends, Hennion avers; it depends on places, devices, bodies, and moments, and the diverse words involved in tasting—*love, passion, practices, habits, mania, obsessions*—indicate taste’s possible plural configurations (Hennion, 2003, 2010, 2015). Hennion defines taste as an attachment to the “right piece at the right moment” (2007, p. 111), thereby—in contrast to Peterson and Bourdieu—dismissing sociological perspectives regarding tastes as pure reflections of social differentiation, education, background, identity games, or power. To argue such a claim, Hennion places processes of reflexivity, exploration, trial, and error at the forefront; these are processes that inform, perform, and precede—rather than determine—choices, valuations, or preferences. Thus, Hennion’s writings permit exploration what might be named the *microsensitives* (Highmore, 2016) of tasting as well.<sup>8</sup>

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8 An example of such microsensivity could be the exploration of how, out of all musicals available, I prefer those of Sondheim; and out of all Sondheim’s works, I prefer the show *Company*; and out of all recorded versions of *Company*, I prefer those with a female Bobby; and out of the various female Bobbies, I prefer Katharina Lenk over Rosalie Craig—but at the same time, what I loved most about that staging was Matt Doyle’s performance of “Not Getting Married Today.”

Hennion furthermore breaks with Bourdieu—and also with Kant—by postulating that taste is not an attribute or an innate quality of human beings or of aesthetical objects; instead, taste is a performance that “acts, engages, transforms and is felt” (Hennion, 2015, p. 268). Within this performance, music-lovers simultaneously improve their skills and sensibilities to and with the artwork in question and become able to reach compromises between sometimes-perceivable incompatible criteria for appreciation (Hennion, 2004, 2007).<sup>9</sup> According to Hennion, this performance relies on four components: 1) the object tasted, 2) a collective of tasters, 3) material and technical devices, 4) and the taster’s body and soul (Teil & Hennion, 2002). Thus, taste builds on acts of engagement, physical training, and a bodily commitment whereby tastes gradually take form as more refined and defined competent acts, produced in and with, for example, music—and not merely facing it (Hennion, 2004, 2007; 2010; Teil & Hennion, 2018). Here, Hennion brings both the aesthetical object, as well as the desires and experiences of the tasting body, back in to questions of taste. Accordingly, taste is not defined as liking or not liking different kinds of music; it is a question of being touched by certain pieces at certain moments with certain people present; it is an act of making oneself feel, and feeling oneself doing, that simultaneously brings repertoires and works into being (Hennion, 2004, 2010, 2015).

Hennion’s work is commonly filed under the umbrella term *the new cultural sociology* (Larsen, 2019; Prior, 2011). Here, he is linked to scholars sensitive to the complex mediating qualities of music, such as DeNora (2001) and Born (2005).<sup>10</sup> Music, Hennion argues, is nothing without its mediators—instruments, scores, performers, stages, recordings, repertoires—and he defines these mediators as productive human or non-human entities who make us, as much as we make them (Hennion, 2003, 2015; Teil & Hennion, 2018):

[B]e it about love, taste or political opinion [...] it is not that easy to say who holds what or what holds whom, what is determining and what is determined. Attachment is neither a cause nor an effect; it is rather an action and its results, seized together, a performance. One is not attached without doing many things; in that sense it is very active, but most of those actions are unable to directly produce a result: as a musical enchantment, it is never the sole effect of voluntary purposes. Rather, their value precisely emanates from the fact that they cannot be reduced to their causes.

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9 Wright (2015) similarly argues that tastes should be primarily understood as sensation, sensibility, and skill: *sense* as the primary tool for apprehending the material world around us, *sensibility* as an orientation towards things and people within this world, and *skill* as a cultivatable capacity to judge between such things and people. Thus, thinking about taste sociologically and sensorily allows us to take in how the material and institutional aspects of the social world are felt in the body and subsequently understood to be good or bad, useful, or valuable.

10 For a detailed report on the concept of mediation in relation to music, see, e.g., Born and Barry (2018).

When such things emerge (or do not emerge), they exceed the efforts made to make them happen. (Hennion, 2017c, pp. 74–75)

Here, Hennion positions his work in connection to the actor–network theories of Latour (2007) as well.

Over the years, Hennion has altered what he named a *sociology of mediation* or *sociology of passion*, into what he now labels a *pragmatic of taste* (2004, 2010, 2019) with the term *sociology of attachment* as a core element (Hennion, 2017c).<sup>11</sup> Prominent within the new cultural sociology in general—and the French pragmatic sociology in particular—is an interest in how agents relate to cultural structures through their contextualized actions (see, e.g., Boltanski<sup>12</sup> and Thévenot, 2006). In other words, scholars as Hennion find their areas of study where cultural structures are being reproduced, criticized, legitimized, or changed by the interaction of meaning-seeking agents. Research is consequently conducted by investigating these agents' perceptions, actions, contexts, and interactions (Larsen, 2019). In other words, Hennion's thoughts on taste are embedded in intellectual traditions privileging practice-based theorizations of taste, foregrounding *questions of agency* (Pomiès et al., 2021).

### 3.3 Combining the two frameworks in and through practice

As seen in the two previous sections, some differences exist between the ontological views involved in Peterson's cultural omnivore and in Hennion's pragmatics of tastes, especially when it comes to a central question within cultural sociology: the question of structure versus agency. On that account, a primary dilemma faced when combining the two frameworks is how far one can assume that (the tastes of) individuals are a result of structural elements such as class, gender, race, or their room for maneuver and of their capacity to negotiate and possibly transcend such structural circumstances.

The two frameworks are implemented in this thesis to serve different purposes. Peterson's writings are implemented to explore a trend and phenomenon among contemporary musical theatre performers, arguing that the taste patterns found within the art form are plural, broad, fragmented, and hybrid (see Article 1). Hennion's work, however, is used to explore how musical theatre's plural and broad taste patterns are performed, negotiated, and tested

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11 Hennion has expanded his pragmatist approach to diverse forms of attachment, such as issues about care, aging, disability, and migrants (see, e.g., Hennion, 2017b).

12 Hennion completed his PhD in sociology with Boltanski as his supervisor.

and how taste's reflexive side enables, forms, and creates openings for capable, creative acting (see Article 3). The two different lenses also reflect the timeline and the development of the thesis. Article 1 is written first and opens the way to explore a more overarching discussion or exploration of taste among musical theatre performers making music. The article also reasons that Peterson's writings are not efficient for exploring omnivorousness outside its structural roots and brackets. Thus, Hennion's writings are implemented to let us step away from associating categorizations of people with categorizations of musical works and instead move toward questions of how people use, understand, maneuver, perform, or are affected by taste—in other words, switching from who acts to what occurs (Gherardi, 2009; Gomart & Hennion, 1999).

According to Zembylas (2014) and DeNora (2019), one way of attacking the perceived paradoxes between, in this case, Peterson's and Hennion's writings, is by conducting research and explorations that focus on *practices*—as done in this practice-based thesis. This is because practice is arguably focusing on processes rather than products and may therefore enable a simultaneously micro and macro analysis. Practices are here defined as “configurations of cohesive activities that establish coordinated and collaborative relationships among the members of a community” (Zembylas, 2014, p. 1) and society is understood as people doing things together (DeNora, 2019). Accordingly, culture is not seen as something constraining people's actions but is instead considered a result of such actions (Schatzki, 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that studying practices shows that there is not necessarily a difference between what happens to, with, or between people at this moment and what is happening on a larger scale to, with, and between science, politics, or technology (DeNora, 2019).

Arguably, the role of practice has long been downplayed in the arts and sciences (Zembylas, 2014)—first, because of a strong focus on the specific content of art in such fields, and second, because of a devaluation of the body as bearer of agency. Nonetheless, Zembylas (2014) argues in favor of scrutinizing artistic practices—and, consequently, artistic processes—to illuminate “the practical dimension of aesthetics” (p. 2) and to illuminate “the emergence of the new” (p. 7), as researching practices may include actors, objects, and institutions simultaneously, as well as aspects of the past, present, and future. Furthermore, and highly important for the scope of this thesis, is that practices do not solely prioritize propositional, conscious, or rational knowledge but also incorporate and spotlight non-propositional ways of knowing (Bassetti, 2014; Zembylas, 2014). As a result, focusing on practices may serve to dissolve or, at least, bridge what are frequently seen as dichotomies within cultural sociology: macro versus micro, music versus society, and subjects versus objects. Wright (2015) even argues that the concept of taste itself can be understood as mediating between the individual and the social, between the sensory experience of the physical world and the ways the social world is

organized, politically and economically. In addition, taste may mediate the barriers between the “internal” body and the “external” world (Wright, 2019). To some extent, I argue that the two implemented frameworks are not entirely opposed to such a bridging, either. For example, Peterson does not reject the idea of individual creativity and refers to the views of DeNora (1995) when he affirms that:

Although the production system profoundly influences culture, the conditions of production do not alone shape culture because other factors, including individual creativity (DeNora 1995), social conditions (Liebes & Katz 1990), and, as Lieberon (2000) has shown, regular endogenous variations in taste, are vitally important. (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 318)

Hennion, on the other hand, does not reject such a concept as determination either, but grants it a synonym of attachment: “[determination] is what links us, constrains us, holds us, and what we love, what binds us, that of which we are a part” (Hennion, 2007, p. 109). However, he stresses that “determination is not the end of the matter; it can be put to work (or not)” (Hennion, 2010, p. 28). In other words, determinisms do not necessarily determine; rather, they open up toward something with uncertain effects or outcomes (Hennion, 2019).<sup>13</sup>

### **3.4 The performer’s body in tasting: Toward a concept of the omnivorous voice**

“Taste is a situated performance shaped by a socio-material world which, in turn, shapes the world,” reason Arsel and Bean (2018, p. 2). The main socio-material component in this thesis is arguably the (omnivorous) human voice itself. “Singing is an activity where you are the ‘instrument,’ a performance where experiences become embodied,” Jenssen (2021) writes; “without the materiality of the body, the flesh, the primal sound of a human being, sound cannot be produced, and the singer is left without an instrument, only the discourse” (p. 125). In writing this, Jenssen posts a critique against a frequent forgetting of the body and materiality in social-constructively or performatively based investigations and conceptualizations of voice.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, even though this thesis explores the voice’s social side, I—as Jenssen

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13 It is also tempting to use Hennion’s own arguments when defending the combination of the two lenses, as he argues for a pragmatic—even eclectic—use of theory when it is beneficial for the empirical exploration in question (Hennion, 2004; Larson, 2019).

14 An overall criticism against the forgetting of material matter in social constructivism is posed by Barad (2003). Here, thoughts about (for example) the non-human, similar to Hennion’s writings, are explored and taken further as part of a post-human scholarly tradition.

(2021)—argue that the materiality of the knowing and acting body and vocal apparatus cannot be left behind. However, as previously touched upon, throughout the history of singing, this materiality has most often been reduced to a notion that the human voice is an innate entity, highly personal, static, and singular in nature. In other words, the sound of a voice has been regarded as (biologically) determined by the size or shape of our vocal apparatus—a determination that has often been linked to other ways of categorizing humans, such as by race or gender (Eidsheim, 2019; Meizel, 2020). Therefore, in conceptualizing the omnivorous voice, I wish to highlight other, arguably more significant ways in which the materiality of the voice plays a part when performing and forming various vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics.

With regards to musical theatre voice, the voice's materiality is especially important in securing vocal sustainability and vocal health, because musical theatre performers may be expected to perform vocally demanding shows as many as eight times a week, often while dancing and acting as well. In other words, they are working at the limits of the human body. Thus, they are also in the position of causing harm to their vocal tissues, just as dancers are in danger of being injured or otherwise affected by their heavy physical workload. Furthermore, phonation, speaking, or singing is not the primary function of the larynx and the vocal apparatus. Physical functions, such as airway protection in swallowing, pressure-valving in childbirth, or maintaining homeostasis in respiration, are all functions executed by the same vocal apparatus responsible for making art (Kayes, 2019). Consequently, the materiality of the voice affects singing when the voice—conjointly with singing—is occupied and formed by more primary functions.<sup>15</sup> As explained by Flynn (2022b):

[G]ood singing—in any genre—requires a high degree of independence in [...] [the] articulatory structures. Unfortunately, nature conspires against us to make this difficult to accomplish. From the time we were born, our bodies have relied on a reflex reaction to elevate the palate and raise the larynx every time we swallow. This action becomes habitual: palate goes up, larynx also lifts. But depending on the style of music we are singing, we might need to keep the larynx down while the palate goes up (opera and classical) or palate down with the larynx up (country and bluegrass) (p. 87).

Such plural roles and functions of the vocal apparatus become prominent or perhaps even problematic when performers experience, for example, overactive or uncontrolled constrictions made by the three pairs of constrictor muscles (musculus constrictor pharyngis superior,

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15 It is important to emphasize that when speaking of “voice” in this chapter, I am referring to a voice not in a diseased or aberrant condition, building on an understanding of voice stating that humans inhabit the same vocal anatomy and are able to manipulate the different parts of their vocal apparatus to create different and desired vocal outcomes (see, e.g., Edgerton, 2014).

medius, and inferior) situated in their throats (Sadoline, 2021). These muscles are partly responsible for (among other actions) closing the windpipe when swallowing to prevent food from entering the respiratory system; however, they are also highly involved in creating the various acoustic positions of the vocal tract and therefore play a significant part in enabling performers to change vocal character or when switching between various styles. When these muscles act or react in an overactive or “uncontrolled” manner, they prevent our vocal folds from closing or vibrating freely, resulting in what may be experienced as a “tight throat,” an (unwanted) breathy sound, or a coughing or tickling feeling during singing (Sadoline, 2021). These muscles are also part of what we experience as a so-called “lump in our throats” when crying or trying not to cry—a feeling that spotlights the muscles and anatomical parts of the vocal apparatus in reacting to, and regulating, emotional aspects of the body as well.<sup>16</sup>

The materiality of the body also becomes prominent in our experiences of constantly working against (or with) our previously learned actions—our so-called *muscle memory*—when learning new vocal doings. Within Estille Voice Training, the prominent vocal behavior or the muscle memory of a voice is called a voice’s *attractor state*. Within CVT, we talk about a singer’s “homeland” or their use of main vocal mode. The notion of “muscle memory” is based on a notion that repeating the same vocal action until the brain remembers it will get a muscle to respond automatically in a certain way (Sadolin, 2021). All procedural learning requires doing, and the result of building muscle memory is a so-called bodily *know-how* involved in all physical skills such as riding a bike, playing an instrument, or singing. Accordingly, to change or develop a targeted vocal output, time and appropriate repetitive practices must be implemented (Leborgne, 2022).

One field of study dedicated to this type of learning is called *motor learning*, where the term “motor” refers to motion and to the motor neurons—the brain cells involved in motion (Helding, 2022). According to Helding (2020, 2022), when implementing motor learning principles, anatomical changes in brain tissues are observed; in other words, the brain has habitually reorganized itself because of a changed and repeated practice. The brain’s potential to make such alterations, to form new and highly myelinated pathways, is called *neuroplasticity* (see Byrne, 2020, for more on singing, motor learning, and neuroplasticity). As our body’s know-how or muscle memory is a result of doings, a voice’s attractor state (or “homeland”) is highly influenced and assembled by what we do *outside* formal voice training as well. For example, the language we speak—with its designated vowels and consonants—plays a significant role (see, e.g., Bittencourt et al. (2021), who argues that the amount of “fricatives in

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16 A current example of this is Ben Platt, who originated the role of Evan Hansen on Broadway. He has talked extensively about his work with his singing teacher Liz Caplan in the process of embodying such an emotionally and vocally demanding role. See, e.g., <https://variety.com/2018/film/features/hollywood-broadway-vocal-coach-1202651160/>

English and plosives in Portuguese explains the fluidity of singing in English and a greater disruption of speech fluidity in Portuguese” (p. 1)). Our voices are also highly influenced by the many voices of those who surround us (Symonds, 2014). This follows a line of reasoning offered by Asare (2020b), arguing that singers have many voice teachers in their lives—both formal and informal, explicit and implicit—and that voice training and singing are always citational practices.

In other words, this thesis—and the concept of the omnivorous voice—argues that the human voice, like any other (musical) object is partly material and partly social. However, the materiality of the voice is not already there fully specced with its properties, merely waiting to be grasped or put into play. Quite on the contrary, the voice must emerge in all its differences by simultaneously making oneself aware of the differences that count (Hennion, 2019). In other words, we have a voice, are a voice, do a voice, and become a voice conjunctly. Linking back to Jenssen (2021), I therefore argue that the concept of the omnivorous voice spotlights how the multiple material sides of the human voice are set into being *with* the discourses, with the tastes, the aesthetical traditions, the stages, the performers, the works rehearsed, and the many voice teachers—formal or informal, human, or non-human—that one embarks upon, interacts with, and attaches oneself to. In other words, I argue that the omnivorous voice is a concept that keeps the materiality and intensity of the voice and the body in mind, but also the social life of the performers—with all their needs and desires.



## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 The methodological plurality of this thesis

This thesis is situated in the intersection, or *interstice*, between the scholarly fields of music education, cultural sociology, musicology, and voice studies. Designing such an interdisciplinary PhD is a move made to open new understandings and views on the pluralities of vocal practices in musical theatre, as the interstice is regarded “a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 16). Such an “in-betweenness” may open a way for a plurality of methodological strategies, allowing musical theatre’s omnivorous voice to be scrutinized from various angles and viewpoints or, more precisely, from an array of experiences. This is done in line with Cox (2020), who argues that “vocal pedagogy and what constitutes knowledge in the field of vocal pedagogy, is complex, nuanced and cannot be reduced to a singular viewpoint.” Similarly, Hennion (2017c) asserts:

[T]here is no method “in general” in social science, no all-terrain toolbox or tricks of the trade. We have to pay a minute attention to people’s objects, issues and concerns, to fragile or indeterminate beings who demand support. We have to be interested in what it is about, what happens, what is going on here, and each time it is different. (p. 79)

Hennion thereby encourages researchers to spend time where their actors of interest gather and to participate in activities in which habits, gestures, and dispositions naturally occur, in order to create meaningful work close to experiences and practices (Hennion, 2003; Hennion, 2010; Pomiès & Hennion, 2021).

To embrace the potential viewpoints and experiences of the omnivorous voice in this thesis, I have divided the research process into three exploratory stances:

1. A theoretical and conceptual level, linked to theories of omnivorousness and tastes, exploring these as part of artistic processes within the frames of cultural sociology, musicology, and voice studies.
3. A practice level, initiating shared explorations in the form of an action research-inspired study with musical theatre students at Kristiania University College, Oslo, Norway.

4. A more discursive level, interviewing leading voice teachers in the Broadway community.

Articles 1 and 2 therefore comprise theoretical discussions, drawing on exciting literature and theory; however, as mentioned in the introduction, these articles are illustrated with performers, recordings, and examples from my experiences as a voice teacher within musical theatre. Article 3 is based on results from the action research-inspired student project, and Article 4 is based on the interview study with American voice teachers. The latter two empirical articles will be the focus of this chapter. Here, I present and reflect upon methodological choices, data collection, and processes of analysis. In addition, I will reflect upon the ontological, epistemological, and ethical considerations of this PhD project in broad terms.

## 1.1 Ontology, epistemology, and ethics

From an overall methodological stance, this work is situated within the overarching realm of practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Thus, research methods are implemented that are seen to blur the line between thinking theory and doing practice (or vice versa) and between being and becoming an outsider (as well as an insider) of the practice I am exploring. I also situate my work within *arts-based* practitioner research because it involves processes for, in, and through the arts (Borgdorff, 2010). Art, as in acts of music—or more precisely, acts of singing—is the object of my research; my research is in the service of the arts, and the arts are part of my methodological vehicle. Still, art will not form part of the thesis evaluation format because it is written within a so-called “scientific” realm of research on music and music education.

Within arts-based research, it is quite common to embody a multifaceted role of teacher (performer) and researcher, as practitioners who use their work to study creative processes offer knowledge that is different from—and perhaps not as easy to assemble as—that of researchers entering the field from outside (Kjørup, 2011). Thus, I am not aiming for neutrality or independence in conducting and documenting this research; instead, elements such as transparency, reflexivity, and detailed description are put forward as measurements for the work’s credibility and validity. In the book *Doing reflexivity*, Dean (2017) proposes the following question: “How do researchers faithfully observe and rapport the social world while recognizing that we have powerful emotions, and are subjective, imaginary beings?” (p. xi). Far from bolstering this work, to deny that I have preconceptions, strong opinions, values, and feelings about voice and musical theatre—in other words, to deny my *humanness*, as Dean

(2017) terms it—might indeed undermine its reliability. Instead, the thesis’s credibility may lie in Alvesson and Sköldbberg’s (2009) views on reflexivity, which they describe as paying attention to all of the aspects described above “without letting any one of them dominate” (p. 269).

I therefore take a pragmatic stance in this thesis, leaving behind the quest for absolute knowledge. Hammond (2013) argues that *pragmatism* offers a view of knowledge as generated in action and reflection on action, meaning that what we claim to know or understand as true—and as truths—are tentative, fallible, and created under particular circumstances to serve particular goals and values. I do, however, argue that the opposite of objectivity and a search for absolute knowledge is not total relativism; instead, as stated by Hennion (2019), it is an array of experiences. I therefore lean on an understanding of the world (ontology) and understanding of knowledge (epistemology) as perpetual processes of being and becoming—something that must be constantly revisited and explored. Hence the choice of verb used in the title of this thesis, *exploring*, where I regard exploration as inviting into the game elements of impermanence, fragility, and the possibility of change. Such an ontological and epistemological stance resonates strongly with the implemented writings of Hennion (2019), regarding the world and everything in it as a “work to be done” (p. 41). Furthermore, such a stand also resonates with Barone and Eisner (2012), who argue that arts-based practitioner research seeks to raise significant questions and engage in conversations rather than to offer final meanings. I thus consider this doctoral thesis as an invitation to a continuum of “unfinished thinking,” echoing what the American Musical Theatre Educators’ Alliance advocates in their community principles: *let us forever speak in drafts*.

In this thesis, I position myself as a singing teacher and a singer, but most of all, as a *singing* teacher. As a *singing* teacher, every voice lesson is an ongoing act of puzzle-solving, combining perceptual clues and cues to find new understandings, assisting singers in their processes of being and becoming performers in the context of today and tomorrow. Trusting, implementing, and listening to my body is pivotal in such contexts—trusting that sometimes my vocal instrument knows where to go and what to do, even when my logical, conscious knowledge cannot follow or reason why I am undergoing and undertaking what I am doing. I have seen this approach to working in the process of writing this thesis as well. While writing a text or working with the theoretical or empirical material, I have implemented “breaks” of singing, rehearsing, and tasting the material I engage with. Returning to a more propositional form of knowing, I have experienced that I view and access the material from a new angle. This way of working resonates with writings by Bresler (2006), who argues that “aesthetics is at the heart of both artistic experience and qualitative research, and that artistic processes [...] can illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research, including data collection, data analysis, and writing” (p. 52). Bresler further highlights the potential of the arts to cultivate

habits of mind that are directly relevant to the processes and products of qualitative research, especially when it comes to “perception, conceptualization, and engagement” (p. 52). In my work, I have utilized singing as a way to sensitize myself to the research I am in the middle of conducting (referring to Vist, 2015). These “singing breaks” are therefore to be seen as variants of the *pause* (as explored in Article 4); they are a fundamental act of attention, a gesture to be installed that creates an ongoing interest (Hennion, 2007). Consequently, researching specific repertoire and performers has changed my singing, constituting new vocal behavior along the way. In being and by becoming a researcher, I have become a different singer and a different *singing* teacher.

This generative sides of my research concern others involved in this thesis as well. In Article 3, I write about how the action research-inspired project with the musical theatre students created new ways of being, doing, and tasting along the way. In Article 4, I write about the generative side of the Covid-19 pandemic and in this methodology chapter, the generative side of the interview situation. Consequently, there will be aspects and outcomes of this PhD project that transcend its written report—taking, for example, the form of embodied practice knowledge. Accordingly, the thesis’s empirical explorations expand an epistemic purpose for inquiry where ethical responsibility surrounds the importance of describing the world as accurately as possible; instead, it takes on an ontological purpose where inquiries, research design, and practices constitute the phenomena under study, while such phenomena conjointly constitute us (Rosiek, 2017).

According to the Norwegian National Committees for Research Ethics (2014), all research should benefit (or at least, not harm) those willing to participate. Both of the empirical studies were approved in the autumn of 2019 by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (see Appendix 1). Upon agreeing to participate, all participants received an information letter and signed written consent forms, and they were told that they could withdraw at any point (see Appendices 2 and 3). This thesis has gathered no sensitive information; however, because the musical theatre communities in Norway and Broadway are relatively small, no guarantee against identification could be given, despite the offer of anonymity. For students, their year of study, details of the repertoire performed, or statements about their voices could be identity markers. The same goes for the elite voice teachers: their use of language, value statements, or references to those with whom they might work may serve as similar markers.

Parts of the two empirical studies were conducted via Zoom; however, audio was recorded only locally using an external recording device. Furthermore, these recordings have been kept anonymized, are password-protected, and will be deleted after the time period of writing this PhD.

## 1.2 The action research-inspired fieldwork

The first empirical study conducted within this PhD was an action research (hereinafter AR)-inspired project with students from Kristiania University College. The decision to embark upon such a study was motivated by a belief that initiating new episodes of practices may enable new understandings of those practices and that these new understandings may bear the potential to reshape the discourses in which the practices themselves are embedded (Kemmis, 2009). In the study, I acted in a dual role as a voice teacher and responsible researcher, and the study site was a second-year bachelor's course titled *Aktuelt Emne* (Current Subject). *Aktuelt Emne* is a course created to examine present-day aspects and trends within musical theatre, and aims to enable the students involved to see themselves as active participants in the musical theatre profession's current and future development. Another premise for the course is that it should be research-integrated and offer practical knowledge of relevant research methodologies. The course took place in January 2021 and lasted four weeks. Ten students participated: three women and seven men, all in their early to mid-20s. The students chose to participate in this course, as one out of four courses offered.

Within this particular course, the pluralities and wide variety of vocal aesthetics, styles, and genres within musical theatre were chosen as the subject and summarized in the following goal:

The students should, after the course, both as part of a group and individually, be able to identify, reflect upon, and perform different musical and vocal styles prevalent in contemporary musical theatre, and further be able to identify, reflect upon, and perform vocal choices that either stabilize or challenge the field's, or the style's established vocal traditions and conventions.

Four musicals were chosen for exploration: *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Lutvak, 2014), *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015), *Dear Evan Hanson* (Pasek & Paul, 2017), and *Hadestown* (Mitchell, 2019). These works offer a broad range of musical and vocal styles prevalent in contemporary musical theatre, such as classical, rap, pop, singer/songwriter, folk, and New Orleans jazz.

### 1.2.1 Choosing the musical theatre works

One of the most influential curators in making Broadway the nexus of contemporary musical theatre is the institution of the Tony Awards, statistically impacting the global distribution, popularity, longevity, and success of a show. Status-wise, the most prestigious Tony Award is that awarded for *Best Musical* (Simonoff & Ma, 2003), a category that focuses solely on

excellence in newly written works. Hodge (2020) argues that being nominated for or winning this category is the most crucial achievement of a new musical in gaining success, respect, and relevance in the Broadway community—and thus, also worldwide. The four selected works—*A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder*, *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hanson*, and *Hadestown*—were chosen from a pool of such Tony Award-winners. This selection may be said to leave out the sometimes edgier, innovative, and more intricate off-Broadway productions, or musicals of non-American origins.<sup>17</sup> My selection thereby also fall into the trap of what Bringardner (2018) describes as an “often unconscious focus on Broadway, neglecting national tours and alternative centers of musical theatre production” (p. 64). Nevertheless, the empirical work exploring these four musicals is conducted from a regional perspective; thus, my exploration conjointly underlines another of Bringardner’s (2018) main points: that a musical always—also vocally—takes on meaning from its specific performance location. Nonetheless, by choosing these four works and eliminating others, we find ourselves with a particular set of possible narratives, possible vocal behaviors, and possible perspectives on the omnivorous voice. The choice of works could easily have been different. The Middle Eastern music-inspired, *The Bands Visit* (Yazbek, 2017), the concert-show *Six* (Marlow & Moss, 2018), and the narrative musical *Fun Home* (Tesori, 2015) were long considered as candidates; so too were other nominated (but non-winning) musicals such as *The Addams Family* (Lippa, 2010), *The Light in the Piazza* (Guettel, 2005) or Green Day’s bio-musical *American Idiot* (Armstrong et al., 2010). If I had started this PhD project later, *A Strange Loop* (Jackson, 2022)—the new star on the musical theatre stage—might have made the cut.

The four chosen works’ impacts on musical theatre history vary widely. *Dear Evan Hanson* and *Hamilton* are perceived to have been game-changers. *Dear Evan Hanson* has the distinction of being the first successful major pop musical. With music and lyrics written by Benj Pasek and Justin Pauland, the musical tells the story of a lonely and anxious teenager who pretends he was best friends with a classmate who recently committed suicide. The musical presents a rather small cast with spoken dialogue between songs, and it is set in contemporary times with scenic references to contemporary social media. Vincentelli (2019) argues that with *Dear Even Hansen*, musical theatre is growing more psychologically complex, describing the show as dramatically sensitive and tastefully intimate. There is limited use of vibrato in the show’s vocal behavior; however, highly audible vocal breaks and other types of “quirkiness” in the vocals pay homage to the contemporary vibe of several songs. The above-the-stage pit band has a basic contemporary band configuration—keyboards, guitar, bass, drums, and strings—and in many ways, the characters of *Dear Evan Hanson* perform their personal soundtrack of sub-pop styles: the voice of Evan’s mother, Heidi, is evocative of stadium

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17 *Hadestown* is a musical originating in Canada, first existing as a concept album containing voices of famous popular music performers such as Justin Vernon (Bon Iver), Ani DiFranco, and Anais Mitchell herself.

rock, Connor's sister Zoe vocalizes an indie vibe, and Evan himself, in many ways, evinces a highly commercial boy band singer. *Dear Evan Hanson's* success as a pop musical was also further solidified when the show's original cast album debuted on Billboard's Top 10 with the highest ranking of any Broadway soundtrack since 1961. The show also won a Grammy for *Best Musical Theatre Album*.

*Hamilton*, on the other hand, is described as "one of the greatest pieces of art and entertainment of the early twenty-first century" (Smith, 2017, p. 520). The musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda made history by breaking urban, rap, and R&B onto the Broadway stage. In addition, it has been hailed for making "history to be imaginable as 'non-White'" (Potter, 2019, p. 303). Casting people of color in the roles of America's "founding fathers," *Hamilton*, has paved way for new color-conscious or conceptual casting processes in musical theatre (Potter, 2019), challenging White actors' monopoly on historical roles in the theatre (Smith, 2017). *Hamilton's* score is filled with a mix of idioms stemming from rap, gospel, soul, and R&B and pays homage to a wide variety of hip-hop artists, styles, and periods. The performers showcase light vocal sound colors, bright twang, use of embellishments such as runs and riffs, and intricate rhythmical patterns. Here, consonants create a percussive effect and rhythmic energy. In *Hamilton*, three main characters never rap: King George III, Eliza Schuyler-Hamilton, and Maria Reynolds. This earns *Hamilton* criticism for perpetuating traditional gender norms within hip hop, where men mostly rap, and women tend to perform the larger lyrical singing parts. In other words, men move the story along; women expand on a state of emotion. Nonetheless, *Hamilton* stands out as a history-making example of the power of theatre to effect cultural change (Hoch, 2018).

As I started work on this PhD project, the musical *Hadestown* was regarded a more hidden treasure; however, the show was paving the way for what vocal coach Sheri Sanders calls a "poetic" style of musical theatre singing, where poetry and old, non-chorus-based forms of songs were put onto the musical theatre stage. Quickly after its debut, the show had also become a firm favorite among my musical theatre students, just as *Dear Evan Hanson* and *Hamilton* had a few years earlier. *Hadestown* blends elements of alternative pop, folk, love ballads, and protest songs. The seven-piece onstage orchestra—including a prominent solo trombone part—is "echoing the sounds of traditional folk music while also having an indie-pop flair" (Isherwood, 2016). Here, the world on top sounds a bit like New Orleans, whereas the world below is constituted by the extremely deep, dark voice of Hades himself—a voice reminiscent of Leonard Cohen's: "You Want It Darker (we kill the flame)." Regarding the vocal style of so-called "poetic musicals," Sanders (@RockTheAudition on Twitter 12/23/2017), contends: "Do not explain it, just feel it, so I can feel it [...] Share it like a poem or a painting, and let us interpret it's meaning." In this context, it is also noteworthy that the songwriting in *Hadestown* is based on the guitar, as a modern version of Orpheus's lyre, which arguably

enables a different vocal output than that found in more traditional Broadway shows, where most songs are written on the piano. Words such as “light vocal delivery” and “intimacy” come to my mind when approaching the cast recording. The performers shift seamlessly between song and speech, accompanied by call-and-response songs. A female three-part tight vocal harmony of the three Greek fates runs through the show and matches the acoustic nature of the instruments.

Four years after debut on Broadway, the victory of *Hadestown* is indisputable. Its success is most notable for the number of women it brought to the podium. The musical was written by a woman and directed by one, and the female producer Mara Isaacs accepted the Tony Award for *Best New Musical*. Director Rachel Chavkin won her own Tony, as did *Anais Mitchell* for *Best Original Score*. Re-animating two ancient Greek myths—that of Orpheus and Eurydice and that of Hades and Persephone—*Hadestown* has also been recognized for its commentary on contemporary politics; for example, strong connections have been made between the song “Why We Build the Wall” and Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign. During the pandemic, *Hadestown* made further Broadway history when one of the musical’s ensemble members, Timothy Oliver Reid, entered the stage in drag as one of the three female Greek fates—and in 2022, the show cast Lillias White as their first female Hermes.

In many ways, the remaining musical, *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder*, may be seen as having had the least significant impact of the four. This show, by Robert Freeman and Stephen Lutvak, tells the story of a disinherited Brit who kills his way up the family tree to become lord of the manor. The show became highly reviewed, in part because performer Jefferson Mays embodied eight different characters within the show’s staging. Thus, the show sparks particular interest for the scope of this thesis with regards to the number of vocal aesthetics and vocal behaviors found and cast within a single voice. Drawing upon—and reminiscent of—an operetta and the ensemble numbers of an opera choir, its score has been accused of being highly pastiche-like. Nevertheless, by winning the Tony Award for *Best New Musical* in 2014, *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* is a strong testimony that on Broadway, the use of classical idioms is not linked exclusively to revivals of golden-age plays. Thus, the show’s inclusion in this thesis underlines an important point regarding vocal omnivorousness within contemporary musical theatre: the years of singing based on classical idioms and techniques are not a bygone era within the musical theatre profession.



### 1.2.2 Designing the study

The study was designed using an AR-inspired approach and organized into three cycles of 1) planning, 2) acting, 3) observing, and 4) reflecting (Kemmis, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Yan, 2017). Even though the branches of AR are constantly evolving and spreading, they are all underscored by their use of action and reflection to solve real-life social problems (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). In other words, AR aims to “change [...] people’s practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 463). In the case of this study, the ‘problem’ to solve was the hypothesis that the students involved (or I, as their teacher) might not see themselves (or myself) as active participants in the musical theatre business’s current and future development. In our case, this was linked to choices and development of vocal behavior and vocal aesthetics. Conducted during the COVID-19 breakout, the project’s cyclic form became imperative as rules for social distancing constantly changed, demanding a continuous rethinking of the possibilities in course content and research activities. The first two weeks (cycle 1) of the four-week course were held on Zoom; then, a dispensation from the government allowed us to perform music together in week three (cycle 2). Approaching week four, this permission was withdrawn, reverting the course and the research, yet again, into a virtual endeavor (cycle 3).

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) emphasize that AR is about improving learning, not improving behavior. Still, artistic behavior is arguably a big part of artistic learning: you learn in and by doing—not only by knowing this or that. Furthermore, when researching artistic practices, the goal is not a clear solution that solves a specific problem once and for all. Therefore, to underline the explorative focus of the study, the course activities (see Table 1 for an overview) were designed by attending to exploratory practice principles (hereinafter EP). EP originates from searching for ethical guidelines in (language) classroom research (Allwright, 2005) and sets out to enable and encourage learners—including their teacher/researcher—to explore “the puzzles” involved in their everyday experiences with the aim of understanding these puzzles more fully (Dawson, 2019). Thus, EP focuses on understanding more than problem-solving and involves the students as practitioners in their own right within their everyday activities. EP also acknowledges the tacit aspects of understanding, arguing that some of “our deepest human understandings can be lived, even if they cannot be described” (Allwright, 2005, p. 359). The course activities were designed to be part of the students’ existing work lives and ongoing voice training—consisting of practicing, lectures, singing lessons, master classes, ensemble work, and written assignments—seeking to avoid feelings that the project was parasitic to their regular working conditions or work life. This became of the utmost importance because the pandemic had already taken its toll on the stamina and motivation of all participants.

Action research cycle	Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 Digital	1	Self-study	Self-study	Introduction workshop	Self-study	Masterclass
1 Digital	2	Vocal technique workshop	Self-study	Individual singing lessons	Self-study	Individual singing lessons
2 Live	3	Aural analysis Workshop	Self-study	Ensemble workshop	Self-study	Ensemble workshop
3 Digital	4	Self-study	Masterclass	Masterclass	Writing reflection notes workshop	Writing of reflection notes

**Table 1: The three action research cycles and course content.**

Within EP, an aim for “quality of life” (and not only “quality of output”) is expressed for its participants. Such a goal is anchored in Aristotle’s concept of *eudaimonia*, containing happiness, well-being, and human flourishing in both “being (the state of living well) and doing (the practice of living well)” (Dawson, 2019, p. 56). In other words, EP focuses on the relationship between knowledge and the life of the body (the person) knowing. EP further asserts that its research must raise issues of agency. This bears similarities to principles of AR, wherein an aim of empowering participants to gain social agency over their lives and workings replaces more positivistic experiments wherein a neutral researcher (tries to) stay in control of the research design and its processes (Nielsen, 2004). In other words, AR and EP share emancipatory roots. Despite such values, designing and conducting a study like this raises various ethical considerations, considering that the event was both a mandatory educational course and a site for research and exploration. Therefore, I actively positioned myself as a co-learner and co-explorer, repeatedly underlining the students’ positions as qualified practitioners. We also spent time discussing AR’s methodology, values, and generative sides (see, e.g., Kemmis, 2009, 2012).

### 1.2.3 Data collection and analysis

On the days of self-study, students worked individually on their chosen and assigned repertoires; the students worked with parts from all four musicals. In the ensemble workshops, I assigned pieces and parts; in individual singing lessons and masterclasses, the students chose their repertoires. In the Introduction Workshop, AR was presented and discussed as a research method and theory on the plurality of vocal aesthetics within musical theatre. In the Vocal Technique Workshop, a short introduction course in CVT was offered as one way to understand and work toward vocal omnivorousness. Finally, in the Aural Analysis Workshop, the

students presented their vocal technical and stylistic understanding and aural analyses of the four selected musicals in groups of two or three (connecting this study to the investigations of original cast recordings done in Article 2).

To pass the course, the students had to actively attend the workshops and hand in personal reflection notes of 1,500 to 2,000 words. The instructions for these reflection notes were based on my curiosity about the students' processes; however, they were also constructed in dialogue with formalities set by Kristiania University College. The students were therefore asked to write for a reader (as in a peer) and for themselves (to learn from and in the process). The reflection note was thus defined as a personal text that should simultaneously show their professional development and reflections. The questions asked were as follows (these questions are also attached in Appendix 4):

1. How do you understand the phenomenon of vocal omnivorousness and the way it is manifested and works within today's musical theatre profession?
5. How do you experience and understand, in and through your body, the vocal demands and the vocal behaviors of the repertoire you have been working with?
6. How would you describe your learning experience or learning outcome of the project?
7. This project has been a part of an external research project; how has this affected your learning experiences or learning outcomes?

All workshops were recorded, amounting to 50 hours of recorded materials. My own experiences from the study were captured by composing field notes; however, being both the teacher and the responsible researcher, this proved challenging. Notes mostly turned into comments about the ongoing singing, or had to be done mentally—instead of in writing—as I was simultaneously teaching, talking, or singing. The commute from my home to the study site is quite far, including a 25-minute boat trip. After teaching, this boat trip became the time and place for a coding of stand-out moments from the course day. The results presented in Article 3 stem primarily from the students' written reflection notes and my brief field notes. The workshop recordings are included with the main purpose of validating situations and adding details to students' reports or to my own. The names of the students presented in Article 4 and in this extended summary are fictive, and the use of quotations, as well as their translation from Norwegian to English, has been approved by the student in question.

### 1.2.1 Analyzing the data with Hennion's thinkings

The empirical data—workshop recordings, reflection notes, and field notes—were first transcribed and categorized according to recurrent themes, similarities, and differences. This was

a way to familiarize myself with the material (Braun et al., 2019). Second, the transcriptions were analyzed through a theoretically driven reading (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Here I incorporated Hennion's core concepts and theories, as described in chapter three, to make sense of, and sensitize myself to, the material in question. In other words, I was reading the data while thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). The published article was written with the intention of relating back to the thesis's second sub-question: *How does taste play a role in the formation of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics in present-day musical theatre?* Thus, the theoretically driven reading was intended to identify and code notable moments where the students and I performed, observed, and reflected on various acts of taste-making and taste-testing. Hennion's writings thus laid the basis for the article in various ways: they brought existing knowledge and ideas about the complex phenomenon of taste into my work, they founded the article's epistemological viewpoint, and they established a lens for its analysis (referring to Collins & Stockton, 2018). In other words, Hennion's writings contributed focus, values, and aims to the article. As such, any generalizing report in the article is not meant as a sample-to-population argument, but rather more as sample-to-theory exploration.

## **1.1 Interviewing elite voice teachers in the Broadway community**

Conversations are a significant part of our lives—this is no less true within the arts—offering opportunities to learn from others' experiences, seek rationalizations for their actions, or explore peoples' opinions, dreams, mistakes, or longings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Similarly, when used as a methodological tool within qualitative research, interviews are conducted to understand different phenomena by accessing people's utterances, descriptions, or articulations of their lived experiential worlds (Brinkmann, 2008).

In the present day, musical theatre voice is taught mostly within a master–apprentice model in a one-to-one environment (Cox, 2020). However, solo voice lessons are offered not only as an aspect of formal schooling, nor as the sole means of helping musical theatre students craft skills for their future careers; rather, “in-service” voice training is often part of a professional's day-to-day activities, as reflected in numerous “student testimonials” on voice teachers' websites. Such training is offered when students are in a specific show, or as part of the audition process. Within the realm of Norwegian musical theatre, I argue that voice teachers tend to turn to American voice teachers when they wish to, or need to, learn more about the latest aspects of musical theatre voice. This was the point of departure for the fourth article of this thesis, wherein I interviewed elite voice teachers in the Broadway community about,

among other things, how they understand and navigate the pluralities of vocal behaviors, tastes, and aesthetics—in other words, the vocal omnivorousness—within musical theatre. The interviews conducted can be seen as what Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) call *conceptual interviews*, serving “to uncover respondents’ discourse models, that is, their taken for granted assumptions about what is typical, normal, or appropriate, and can favorably be conducted in concert with questions that ask for concrete descriptions, which sometimes gives interesting points of contrast” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 177).

The term “elite” in this context describes experts who inhabit prestigious, influential positions and are accorded authority and status by their audiences and peers; hence, they are regarded as essential insiders with valuable “inside information” to share and who have the ability to exert influence (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Liu, 2018; Patton, 2015). Defining an elite is always challenging because expertise is highly domain-specific (Ericsson, 2018). The six participating elite voice teachers were recruited by reputation based on their perceived status as distinguished voice teachers in the Broadway community, and were referred to me by others within the profession. That is to say, they were selected and linked to the focus of my research not because they are statistically representative of the field. Each teacher has a long track record of working with singers playing significant roles on Broadway. They are also described as “teachers of the teachers”; this characterization is also corroborated by students’ testimonials on their websites, among other places. Their recognized mastery of both craft and pedagogy, combined with a solid online presence attending to singers globally and on national tours, mean that their teachings have the potential to achieve a worldwide impact.

### 1.1.1 The interviews

When first reaching out to the teachers by e-mail, I presented my ongoing work in the following manner:

*The omnivorous voice* is a PhD project deciphering the dynamisms of vocal tastes and vocal techniques in contemporary musical theatre. My point of departure is that musical theatre is a rapidly changing art form, expanding and including a wide range of popular musical styles and sub-genres to its repertoire, drawing upon whatever musical style needed to suit its purpose, thus, leaving variety and change as the current norm. But what happens to the voice if so be the case? To voice training? I look at this from the angle of teaching musical theatre voice to bachelor students in Norway, far away from New York, still with the idea of an industry standard of vocal aesthetics and the “geist” of Broadway being present.

Gaining access to elites is a primary obstacle to interviewing them (Patton, 2015). In my outreach, I contacted ten voice teachers; one declined for personal reasons, and three did not reply to my invitation. As six voice teachers agreed to participate in the interview study, a pilot interview was carried out with the help of my fellow voice teacher at Kristiania University College, Associate Professor David Fielder. Fielder was invited to share his thoughts on my questions' themes and phrasings, after which six main questions were mailed in advance to the voice teachers, thereby ensuring that all interview topics would be approved upfront. Due to the interviewees' tight schedules, little room was given for larger open questions; the questions were therefore designed as either *presupposition lead-in questions* or questions asked in an *illustrative examples format* (Patton, 2015, pp. 460–461) (these questions are also to be found in Appendix 5, Interview Guide):

1. In my ongoing doctoral thesis, I contemplate contemporary musical theatre as a rapidly changing art form, absorbing and including a wide variety of musical genres and styles to its repertoire, and where the idea of cross-training the vocal apparatus and an expectation to master multistylism vocally, is repeatedly voiced. Seen from your stance as a voice teacher in the profession, how do you view this?
8. What do you regard as excellence in teaching musical theatre voice?
9. How do you personally work to stay current and apt in your profession as a voice teacher? And what drives you in this work?
10. Genres, musical styles, and vocal traditions are often perceived as fixed entities to be reproduced/cited in musical theatre performances. What part do you see your personal (vocal/musical) taste play in your teaching?
11. Arguably, the pandemic and the closing of Broadway (and beyond) came with a silver lining in the form of time to contemplate the genre and the industry. How do you relate to this as a voice teacher?
12. Some might argue there exists an audible American sonic stamp, a so-called “Broadway sound”, is implemented in contemporary musical theatre, regardless of the style performed or location of performance; how do you view this?

When excess time permitted, the interviews concluded with an open-ended closing question such as “what, if anything, do you wish I would have asked you that I didn’t?”

Even though questions were mailed in advance, the conversations took different forms. The voice teachers took the lead in structuring the conversations by not addressing the questions directly or by picking an order due to personal preference. Thus, the interviews took the form of more informal conversations rather than semi-structured interviews as initially planned. One challenge to be tackled in this regard was that my interviews contained subject interaction

across cultures. Even though the American and Norwegian musical theatre scenes are somewhat intertwined, there is a *cross-culturalness* (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) involved—first and foremost, because of the language used and English not being my native tongue. Therefore, my personal experience of being a musical theatre student in New York played an important part in the interview situation. In addition, I had previously attended solo lessons from two of the voice teachers and online workshops with all six. This connection introduced an ethical challenge linked to achieving what may be called an *emphatic neutrality* in the interview situation (Patton, 2015). This manifested in my attempts to avoid becoming too personally involved in the conversations, as the interviewees often asked about my own opinions on the questions at hand. I also felt extremely honored to talk to these voice teachers, for whom I have the utmost respect. Still, at the same time, I tried not to stay too distant, as this could result in a reduced complexity of the issues under scrutiny.

The interviews took place from November 2021 to March 2022. The time slot made available by the interviewees ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Due to the Covid-19 situation, all interviews were held online. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed in Nvivo. Because of the voice teachers' tight schedules, member checks of citations were not provided. However, seeking to ensure that the teachers' statements should cause no harm, Article 4 is written to address the voice teachers' pool of statements as a whole, not necessarily to seek out the singularities of the different teachers; thus, its report is organized by generating common themes.

### 1.1.1 Doing reflexive thematic analysis

The interviews were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (hereinafter TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive TA is a method, or a starting point, to explore and engage with qualitative data; it is used when a researcher is interested in people's views, perceptions, experiences, understandings, rules, values, behaviors, or practices (Braun et al., 2019). Reflexive TA emphasizes the importance of the researcher's subjectivity and reflexive engagement with theory and data, and considers this subjectivity analytic resource (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, in the analysis process I was changing perspectives between that of a narrative-seeker looking for themes in the voiced utterances of the teachers, and that of a narrative creator, generating themes and molding utterances into a coherent article (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In other words, engaging with reflexive TA became a process of "reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, returning" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 332).

Within reflexive TA, a *code* is an analytic entity that captures an observation or a facet and is used to develop initial themes. By contrast, *themes* are "like multi-faceted crystals – they

capture multiple observations or facets” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 340). As presented in Article 4, my themes were brought into being deductively, impacted by the conceptual framework of the omnivorous voice, my theoretical understandings of musical theatre voice, ontological and epistemological viewpoints, and my practice knowledge within the profession. At the same time, the themes were also brought about inductively, as the interviewees’ utterances made me think twice and again about my views and the literature on musical theatre voice. The themes were semantically generated by the explicitly expressed content of the data, but were also laterally generated, including flavors of what I argue the statements reveal about the elite vocal teachers’ assumptions, values, and social contexts (referring Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). I thus regard these categories as continuums, not dichotomies (referring Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Furthermore, I regard the voice teachers involved, as well as myself, as humans “in the making.” People say one thing, do another, change their values, consider, re-consider, negotiate, and renegotiate, as “there are no stable grounds, or foundations from which the human subject may know the world once and for all” (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 594). Therefore, the interviews themselves, as well as the interview reports, are considered meaning-making practices wherein people get together and create new possibilities for subjectivity and action; in other words, they bear the potential for “bringing new kinds of people and new worlds into being” (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 586). Consequently, I acknowledge that the data assembled and presented in this extended summary and in Article 4, is “partial, incomplete, and always in a process of re-telling and re-membering” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. ix).

## **1.1 On the validity and credibility of this thesis as a whole**

As with other qualitative research, this thesis’s claims and statements are not easily so-called verified, generalized, or reproduced. Thus, the thesis’s criteria for credibility and validity lie elsewhere, arguably starting from the first thematization to this final report. To strive toward credibility and validity of this thesis—in other words, to strive toward trustworthiness—the following measures are implemented:

I have aimed to provide as much information as possible about the various research processes, both in the articles and in this extended summary. Here, detailed descriptiveness has been essential. I have therefore prioritized extensive transcripts from the generated material in my texts. In doing so, I hope my readers will understand something more—or something different—when interacting also more directly with the material in question.



I have provided details about my own positioning in this project. I have sought to be transparent and bold when positioning myself, with all the attendant ethical considerations, because my actions are an important part of the thesis's measurements. I have strived toward sensitivity about what I bring to the table; still, I have not sought to remove myself entirely from the equation. For example, the referenced musical theatre works and performers might not be present in this work, if I were an outsider researching the profession's practices by looking in. Consequently, my trustworthiness as a voice teacher, researcher—and maybe even as a performer—may come into play when evaluating this work, for prolonged engagement with the research field in question is highly valued in practitioner research.

I have engaged closely in dialogue with theory to increase the strength of argumentation and statements throughout. Consequently, a generalizing report is performed as a sample-to-theory exploration, not as a sample-to-population argument.

I have continuously sought feedback from my peers and other significant voices within the field—first from my supervisors and my colleagues at Norwegian Academy of Music and Kristiania University College, and then from the opponents at my midterm evaluation and my trial defense. Furthermore, eight peer reviewers and several journal editors have influenced this thesis. Even though its content is my responsibility alone, its claims, statements, and arguments have been tested along the way. I hope that presenting at conferences and participating in scholarly dialogues has ensured that this work comes across as relevant and up to date. My goal has been to show (extended) examples of what exists in my everyday life as a voice teacher and as a researcher, suspecting that this may exist elsewhere; if not, maybe it could, or perhaps it could not. I have also developed new theory and I have tested and implemented these thoughts during the period of my PhD research. It has been an honor to see where and when my concepts make sense and are used beyond my writing as well.<sup>18</sup>

I have been transparent about the generative sides of this research. As Hennion argues, listening, making someone else listen is already a way of loving something more (2015), and exploring a musical work through singing is forming and leaves traces in the vocal apparatus in the same way that our vocal apparatus forms the musical work in question. Therefore, I underline my profound gratitude for the trust placed in me by the student participants.

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18 As seen, for example, in Aaen et al. (2022):

[M]oreover, singers from the study sang a variety of different genres, and some of them combined classical career with musical theatre or rock styles, showing how singing more than one genre—also referred to as cross-over singing or vocal omnivorousness—does not negatively impact vocal health if performed using correct and appropriate technique over both styles of singing (p. 9).

The project's validity and credibility is further determined by the success of my research in answering the research questions presented. This part was somewhat tricky, as the Covid-19 pandemic influenced and changed every step of the project. Still, having put the final ink in the page (for now), the project did end up being very similar to what I had envisioned, even though the student project ended up mostly on Zoom—thus focusing on solo songs rather than ensemble pieces—or that the elite voice teachers' interviews had to be conducted online, rather than in person and infused with the New York atmosphere of freshly sung notes in the teachers' personal voice studios.

In sum, it is now for my readers to judge whether this research is to be found credible or regarded as valuable input to the various scholarly fields it involves. As with any other performance, the *believability* of this work is in the hands of the receiver, and its credibility will be measured as time goes by, depending on whether something has been changed or confirmed in the ways we approach, maneuver, understand, teach, or learn (musical theatre) voice. In this regard, I do not necessarily aim for a change into an opposite, but any feeling of opportunity, hope, freedom, or increased space to maneuver after reading this work would be considered an honor. However, feelings or thoughts of disagreement will also be more than welcome, as engaging in conversations about voice, vocal training, and musical theatre worldwide, is an ever-changing opportunity and privilege I don't take lightly.

## 2 Summary of the articles

### 2.1 Voicing omnivorousness, assembling the omnivorous voice: The American musical explored

Article 1 serves to explore the various ways omnivorousness is manifested within the American musical—both contemporarily as well as from a historical perspective. The article conveys a theoretically informed discussion, combining a historical perspective on musical theatre with contemporary issues of embodiment and performance, and it is co-written together with Sidsel Karlsen, professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music and main supervisor of this PhD project.

The article argues that American musical theatre is a rapidly changing art form, gorging, feeding on, and absorbing a wide range of musical genres into its repertoire. In other words, American musical theatre is prone to draw upon any musical style that can suit its purpose and tell its stories. Furthermore, the article offers insight into the trajectory of *cultural omnivorousness* as the term was coined by Richard Peterson, with its surrounding debates about the framework's validity and implementation. The article also offers an overview of the vocal history of musical theatre, from its sparse beginnings of the last century up until the present day. In doing so, we show that omnivorousness is not only a phenomenon within cultural consumption but is also a trend and phenomenon within cultural production. In other words, omnivorousness within musical theatre is produced, brought about, and enjoyed by composers, producers, and performers as well as audiences; thus, omnivorousness ultimately manifests as artistic and embodied practices.

The article argues that from the stance of the musical theatre composer, omnivorousness is manifested and (re)produced as ways of styling a show with sonic references to create a musical subtext whereby a play or a character is placed in time, space, geographical context, or emotional state. From the producers' point of view, omnivorousness is manifested and (re)produced as strategies of securing commercial success by capturing "the next new" as well as by presenting a successful back catalog of revivals. When it comes to musical theatre performers, the demands imposed on performers by the omnivorous profession have arguably brought about a turn from univorous to omnivorous vocal practitioners. Thus, a *vocal omnivorousness* is seen manifested and (re)produced all the way down to the micro-level of the vocal folds and the muscles regulating the vocal apparatus. In other words, performers are seen to assemble what is conceptualized in the article as *the omnivorous voice*.

## 2.2 Exploring original cast recordings as “vocal scripts”: Navigating “vocal omnivorousness” and learning “the songs” of musical theatre

Article 2 investigates how vocal omnivorousness is maneuvered, manifested, and (re)produced as ways to perform and attend to strong artistic values and expectations within the profession. Such values include the honoring of a part’s signature sounds or bowing to a so-called global industry standard of vocal aesthetics. Thus, the article argues that the narrative of “one true voice” is left behind and that singing, and the human voice, must instead be regarded as a thick aesthetic event, as something plural, multilayered, and complex, and constantly moving on a continuum of human bodies, musical objects, interactions, and contexts.

The article came about in a time when the world was locked down due to the pandemic; I prepared for the AR-inspired study documented in Article 3 without having experienced some of the musicals we would work with, live and before even some of the sheet music was published. My only points of reference were the original cast recordings and some live performance clips from YouTube. Consequently, I started to contemplate the role of original cast recordings in forming musical theatre performances and performers living within an omnivorous vocal world, and how these recordings are—and can be—implemented into musical theatre voice training. Musical theatre scores are, in general, not well annotated, commonly lacking indications of vocal requirements. Consequently, teachers and performers rely on sonic information to understand the many vocal demands and behaviors of the sung: the sound of a voice and its vocal practices. In contemporary musical theatre, the original cast recordings may be the only source of such sonic information—the only way to navigate the vocal omnivorousness within the profession, especially when situated outside, for example, Broadway. The article therefore argues that the recordings assume the status of so-called *vocal scripts*, defining these as sonic entities choreographing real-time social interactions between players.

The article draws on writings from the fields of musicology, cultural sociology, performing arts pedagogy and voice studies, and it takes form as a theoretical informed discussion, illustrated with examples from my experiences as a voice teacher and a performer. The article’s theoretical contribution is twofold—first offering insight into and establishing the term vocal script and, second, exploring the ways of listening involved when interacting with a such multifaceted vocal script.

## **2.3 We are also music lovers: Testing vocal tastes in higher musical theatre education**

Article 3 attends to musical theatre performers in training and living within a vocal omnivorous profession, and showcases how musical theatre students' broad taste patterns are situated and depending on "everything." In other words, the article spotlights how the students' tastes take form as an attachment to the "right" piece, the "right" behavior, at the "right" moment, on behalf of a search for a more stable overarching taste or of a canon of superior works.

The study was designed using an action research-inspired approach and is situated within a second-year bachelor's course at Kristiania University College in Oslo, Norway. In the study, I embodied a dual role as the students' voice teacher and responsible researcher. The data collected—consisting of students' reflection notes, my field notes, and workshop recordings—were analyzed through Antoine Hennion's theoretical framework of taste as a performance that acts, engages, transforms, and is felt, and which involves skills and sensitizing. The article furthermore accounts for situations where tastes were performed, tested and negotiated, and it argues that despite taste, tasted objects, and tasters having a history, taste is always brought into a negotiating presence, further producing implications for the future. The article thereby illuminates how tastes form vocal behaviors and how vocal behaviors form tastes, reporting on moments within which tastes were performed, the musical object was central in taste-making, tastes were equipped, possible distastes of others were explored, tastes were negotiated, and the "sound of gender" was tasted.

The article also presents the following claims about the role of taste within the broader field of musical theatre voice, as well as within the field of music education:

1. Musicians are to be seen as music lovers. For audiences to have performances to love, performers must love first—performing acts of tastes and valued artistic (in this case, vocal) behavior
13. Taste is part of how performers (musicians) interact with one another and with the world, in and through aesthetic processes
14. What we do (or don't do) in our tasted performances stabilizes builds upon, tears down, or challenges (vocal-)musical traditions, styles, and genres

In other words, the article argues that taste, taste-making, and taste-testing are part of systematic and formal pedagogics, and thus a part of the students' ongoing vocal training.

## 1.1 Musical theatre's omnivorous voice: Interviews with elite voice teachers in the Broadway community

Article 4 serves to explore the pluralities of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics in contemporary musical theatre within the context of teaching musical theatre voice. Through interviews with six elite voice teachers in the Broadway community, the article investigates how the pluralities of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics are understood, maneuvered, and expanded in the field of teaching musical theatre voice today—here, expansion was an object of particular focus in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The article implements and sets in motion the concepts of *vocal omnivorousness* and *the omnivorous voice*, and contributes to the fields of performing arts pedagogy and voice training by offering insight into how vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics are gorging on, influenced by, taught within, and created in dialogue with the community and society in which our voices exist.

The elite voice teachers were recruited based on their reputation as prominent voice teachers. The transcribed interviews were analyzed by engaging with Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, and four central themes were generated and presented: 1) understanding code-switching and shape-shifting as a fundamental potential of the voice, 2) maneuvering vocal omnivorousness by carefully attending to sonic information, 3) searching for authenticity in an omnivorous vocal world, and 4) expanding and diversifying vocal aesthetics beyond styles and musical genres.

Furthermore, the article argues that the concepts of vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice were being understood, (re)produced, and manifested as ways to secure employability in a highly commercial musical theatre profession, to assist vocal sustainability for highly pressured musical theatre performers, to enable uniqueness and a sense of authenticity in an omnivorous vocal world, and to work toward diversity and equity in an ever-changing Broadway scene. Consequently, the article diverges from previous writings on omnivorousness by illuminating that within musical theatre, it is not solely the intense and growing variety of musical genres and vocal styles gorged on that impact the wide variety of sounds heard, used, and taught; musical theatre's broad vocal aesthetics are also becoming increasingly diversified by elements like race- or color-conscious casting practices, the idea of gender-neutral voice teaching and the appearance of new performance formats.

## 2 Discussions

Previous research on omnivorousness within cultural sociology has emphasized that the omnivorous cultural consumer does not constitute one type of person; on the contrary, there are a multitude of ways to understand, maneuver, legitimize, and produce broad and omnivorous taste patterns in today's complex society (Bennett et al., 2008; Ollivier, 2008; Warde et al., 2007). By the same token, being and becoming an omnivorous vocal performer—and aiming to master the omnivorous voice—are understood, manifested, (re)produced, and maneuvered in highly diverse manners, as seen in and the four articles. This is because the social phenomenon of (vocal) omnivorousness takes on different meanings and doings—with both positive and negative connotations—in different contexts by standing in relation to other phenomena, social tendencies, and values.

I will begin this chapter by delving into three such understandings and surrounding ideas: omnivorousness and employability; omnivorousness and artistic agency; and omnivorousness and authenticity—all linked to the thesis' first sub-research question: *How is (vocal) omnivorousness manifested and (re)produced in musical theatre voice today?* Then I will turn to the second sub-question: *How does taste play a part in forming vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics in present-day musical theatre?* Here, I will explore how taste matters within higher musical theatre education, how taste plays a part in forming vocal-musical styles, and how vocal omnivorousness in today's musical theatre profession expands beyond the gorging on of various musical genres and styles.

Finally, in the light of these discussions and questions, I will return to the thesis's main research question: *How can the pluralities of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics within contemporary musical theatre—and implicitly the human voice itself—be understood and maneuvered through a conceptual framework of the omnivorous voice?* Here, I will present the framework's present form before I look upon my theoretical contribution with critical eyes. This is done by looking into whether teaching and learning the omnivorous voice pushes toward a vocal eclecticism or toward a new type of vocal specialization.

### 2.1 Vocal omnivorousness as manifestation of employability

“In today's musical theatre industry, versatility is employability,” Benson proclaims (2018, p. 10), and throughout this thesis's four articles, the musical theatre profession is repeatedly characterized as highly commercial (Wolf, 2020) and highly competitive (Edwards & Flom,

2013).<sup>19</sup> According to Wolf (2007), this undisguised commercial side of the profession causes the aesthetics to be always—and in unforeseen ways—steered by financial relationships and interests. In present-day musical theatre profession, there appears to be no limit to the potential extent and volume of vocal omnivorousness; the moment something new appears, it appears to demand compulsory incorporation into the vocal behavior of the performer. Vocal omnivorousness may thereby be manifested and (re)produced as means to secure so-called employability. In other words, vocal omnivorousness may be brought into being to increase a performer's chance of survival in a rapidly changing commercial and competitive profession, consequently making the musical theatre performer a “servant” of the of the market as well as of the art. As described by Edwards and Flom (2013),

While some may argue a student's pursuits in art education should be targeted at artistic development rather than career preparation, for students who must pay their own way via student loans, job security is a real concern and should be discussed before amassing tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loans. (p. 33)

*Employability*, a phenomenon hard to measure and define, is frequently linked to debates about how it can or should be developed and who bears the responsibility for its provision (see, e.g., Cheng et al., 2022, for an extended overview). Within higher education, the term is operationalized mostly in a desire to facilitate students' acquisition of skills, knowledge, and personal attributes to master the initial stages of their work lives (Bennett, 2016), leading to what Smith (2015) calls a commonly seen “pedagogy of employability” (p. 67).

Perkins (2015) underlines that “twenty-first-century musicians need to develop multiple identities and breadth of know-how to establish and maintain diverse portfolios that span musical and creative practices” (p. 99), and Ollivier (2008) argues that omnivorousness may be considered the “possession of transposable cultural resources, such as tolerance, adaptability, flexibility, mobility, and a search for self-improvement” (p. 124). Such desirable personal qualities may be considered linked to an increasingly accepted diversity, allowing individuals to “express themselves in different ways in different contexts every day” (Hofvander Trulsson et al., 2015, p. 209). However, such qualities might also be motivated and manifested as a strategy, or the ability, to become potentially employable by “everyone.” As Ben, one of the students in the AR-inspired study, argued:

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19 For example, a Broadway audition may allow for only about a minute of performing a 16-bar audition cut and where performers stand in line for hours for brief opportunities to be seen. Competition within the profession is also considered to be more intense for women than for men (Edwards & Flom, 2013).



For whom do you do it? For whom do I lay down all the hours of thinking, rehearsing, and drilling? [...] For me, the demand for omnivorousness is a bit scary. Vocal omnivorousness demands the performers' availability regardless of one's background as a singer. Honestly, I think it has been hard to realize that the way one sings is not necessarily what books you the job. At the same time, I learn as I go and grow in terms of what I like and don't like [...]. I think it is first and foremost important to have something safe and comfortable, to keep the joy in what you do [...] It must give you something; it must mean something. (von Germeten, 2022a)

Ben's statement spotlights the potentially overwhelming feeling of external vocal demands faced in musical theatre today. However, the statement also illuminates musical theatre performers' strong love, passion, joy, and firm attachment to the art form as well. According to Ben, this joy motivates him to endure the hours and hours of corporal training, testing, exploring, and repetition the art form requires. "Follow your passion" is a well-known mantra in career decision-making, where passion-seeking is considered a path for avoiding the potential drudgery of paid work-life. However, according to Ceck (2021), following your passion may also legitimize and perpetuate an overworked—even exploited—labor force, and serve to reinforce class, race, and gender segregation or inequality. Following one's passion may even threaten a person's personal well-being, when putting too much of their identity into the work (Ceck, 2021). Thus, the musical theatre performer's strong love for the art form, combined with an external demand for mastering vocal omnivorousness as a means of bolstering employability, could turn singing into a sort of vocal paint-by-numbers game, training performers to become "cookie cutters" instead of artists (referring to Article 4), as we have been trained—and, to a certain extent, continue to train our students—to say "yes" in the industry.

Thus, the never-ending potential of an omnivorous voice—where everything can be master or reached if only worked for hard enough—may resemble values from so-called "new public management" or neo-liberal ideas. Such ideas posit that the individual is solely responsible for their economic or social success or failure, and advocate for personal qualities like self-regulation and perpetually change as highly sellable features (Meizel, 2020) (see also Karlsen, 2019). In Article 4, Broadway was considered as imposing greater demands to produce vocal employability than musical theatre elsewhere in the world, and it was argued that performers who did not bow to external vocal demands would not only fail to be hired, but would also be laughed at. These high-pressured, external vocal demands, furthermore, positioned the profession or musical theatre business as the opposite of life within the voice studio. As one of the voice teachers mentioned when discussing resistance against the replication of an industry standard of vocal sounds: "no voice teacher has ever changed the business."

At the same time, vocal omnivorousness, or “singing with many voices” as Meizel (2020) describes it, may be exactly what makes one resistant to external demands and expectations, as “the neoliberal subject is not only a self-regulating and perpetually developing salable commodity but also an entire solo enterprise in itself” (p. 5). Meizel further refers to Chapman (2013) in this regard, who in turn describes the neoliberal subject as “a kind of multitasking virtuoso, whose acquisition of multiple skill sets enables her to remain an agent, rather than an object, of volatile market conditions” (p. 452). Such ideas also resonate with writings of Reay (2015), who argues that omnivorous practices are shown to be a game of social elevation and a means of distinction, but also a way of crossing boundaries and reducing such differences as well.

## 2.2 Vocal omnivorousness as enabler of vocal artistic agency

Referring to the section above, working toward mastering vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice—teaching and learning voice in a manner where “all” sounds of the human voice are potentially included—may also be a fruitful creative endeavor to enable or empower so-called *agency*. Within music education, *musical agency* is a term with diverse meanings and connotations. Still, according to Karlsen (2011), all interpretations agree that “musical agency, one way or the other, has to do with individuals’ capacity for action in relation to music or in a music-related setting” (p. 4). In this thesis, the term *artistic agency*—taking in the close intertwinement of singing and music in musical theatre with acting and dancing—is defined as the individual’s perceived room for maneuvering, negotiating, bringing forward, and acting on one’s artistic valuations, tastes, or wills. In other words, “artistic agency” is the performance of, capacity for, and space to create new thoughts and actions when desired or needed—and not merely repeating past artistic routines or customs (see, e.g., Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Regardless of what adjective you put in front of it, the word agency is a doing situated in time and space; it is not a fixed goal or a quality of the human, possessed or not possessed (Rikandi, 2012). Agency is, therefore, domain-specific and multidimensional in character; an individual does not have a singular agency, and an increased sense of—or performed—agency in one domain may transfer positively into another, or it may not (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Samman & Santos, 2009).

Within musical theatre, negotiating or performing artistic agency can be played out as room for maneuver to decide which genres to perform, which type of repertoire or parts to immerse oneself in, or having a voice in questions of who gets to sing what, sing what when, and sing

what how within the industry. Additionally, such agencies may play out on a more micro-aesthetic level as well, manifested in questions such as: *How do I want to form and sing this phrase? What sound quality am I looking for? What idioms do I want to implement? What does this piece/phrase/sound mean to me?* Thereby, (vocal) artistic agency also manifests itself as having a say in what or who defines good singing as well: *Is my singing good because I believe it ensures sustainability and good vocal health? Is it good because I performed and enjoyed it with utter delight? Is it good because it conforms to established norms, standards, or conduct of approved vocal behavior? Is it good because it showcases intrinsic properties of the artwork itself? Is it good because it looks good on me?*

“Agency is contextual, relational, and it can be nourished and developed,” argues Rikandi (2012, p. 36), who defines “empowerment as an increase in certain kinds of agency” (p. 41). For me as a voice teacher, the concept of *vocal artistic agency* may thus be operationalized in an ongoing question of: *Do musical theatre performers sing, get to sing, and implicitly learn to sing in the way(s) that they want to be heard?* However, to nourish, develop, empower, and enable artistic agency, I also argue that *awareness* is critical. For example, in the AR-inspired part of this thesis, the goal was for the students to be able to identify, reflect upon, and perform different musical and vocal styles—and furthermore, to be able to identify, reflect upon, and perform vocal choices that either stabilized or challenged such established musical and vocal styles. Here, awareness (i.e., the ability to identify, reflect upon, or perform tradition) was defined a means to enable artistic agency—the ability to perform acts that challenged or stabilized such traditions.

Within the practices of the sung, awareness is mainly accessible by sonic information. Still, as illuminated by Eidsheim (2019), “while only some situations are identified as voice lessons, each and every moment of listening, and every moment of vocalization is a voice lesson wherein we do, or not do, adhere to the established conventions” (p. 178). Thus, I argue that learning, implementing, teaching, and reflecting upon a system or methodology for deciphering “all” types of sounds become pivotal within musical theatre voice training. Furthermore, I posit that such listening will not automatically force us to bow to the “ghost of Broadway” (Wolf, 2020)—quite the contrary. As Article 2 indicates, interacting with, for example, original cast recordings and the many voices of others—in an experimental, aware, and reflexive manner—may generate the possibility to transition from rules to choices, even though such choices may not always be perceived.

Relevance to this is also found in Article 3, where I argue that notions such as a student’s “artistic expression” are not innate or already present when they begin their (vocal) training, but rather that “personal expression” is an ongoing activity. The article also emphasizes that

personal tastes or performance characteristics do not automatically show themselves as the opposite of the collective. In other words, breaking with “everything” is not necessarily a sign or manifestation of agency; instead, taste and attachment—and, arguably, artistic agency as well—is the creation of satisfactory ways to live with and within the collective, ways that feel good and feel right.

## 2.3 Vocal omnivorousness and a search for authenticity

In the four articles, I argue that the concept of vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice challenge (at least) two established voice views or discourses of voice and vocal technique present within musical theatre voice and the larger field of singing. The first discourse challenged is the notion that a voice must be trained in a singular manner, based on technical principles from classical singing, to secure quality of voice or so-called “beauty” of vocal expression (Edwin, 2005). Such a voice view exists not only within classical singing styles; an almost hegemonic status of this discourse has also imposed itself into the world of popular music as well (Potter, 1998). This imposition exemplifies what Dyndahl et al. (2020) describe as “the apparent ability of hegemony to co-opt and mutate even anti-hegemonic projects” (p. 8) by universalizing specific values. For example, within musical theatre singing, Berg (2011) quotes renowned voice teacher Mary Saunders-Barton in advocating such views: “musical theatre vocal technique should first be built on the same fundamentals as one finds in classical singing. Only when that technique is firmly in place and understood does it make sense to introduce concepts of mixing and belting” (p. 100).

Within contemporary musical theatre, traces of this discourse are also voiced by the still-standing terms *legit(imate) voice* and *legit(imate) singing technique*. These terms refer to theatrical traditions or theatres that produce so-called “serious,” high-quality professional work, rather than more variety shows or burlesque pieces. However, in recent decades—and in losing the battle for aesthetic supremacy—this vocal aesthetical discourse has, to some degree, transformed itself into a discourse about vocal health. Here, singing based on classical singing techniques is still frequently advocated as the only way to ensure the sustainability of the singing voice (see Article 4 for more on this).

The second vocal discourse challenged is the idea that learning to sing, or training one’s voice through singing lessons, may threaten a performer’s voice print or so-called *vocal authenticity*. Such values stand strong in popular musics, viewing voice as natural and instantly recognizable (Callaghan, 2019), and where the sung is considered a strong representation of the self (Huges,

2013). Furthermore, this discourse can be connected to the charismatic myth of the artist, in which talent is viewed as something inborn (Kris & Kurz, 1979). In the history of musical theatre singing, the notion of an untrained, and thus “authentic” voice, has been linked to the sound of belting voices (Taylor, 2012). In Article 1, this notion is exemplified by the often-told anecdote of Gershwin ordering belting star Ethel Merman to never go near a voice teacher (Bryan, 1992). However, in recent years, as belting is being taught in every musical theatre education, the rock or pop voice is seemingly replacing the belted voice’s status as something natural and authentic and thus “impossible” to learn. In this regard, “authenticity” is a term used to define what is perceived as the essential, genuine, natural, or innate properties of material objects, social and cultural practices, or phenomena (Dyndahl & Nielsen, 2014). In other words, authenticity is related to a notion that some sounds are categorizable as natural, true or alive, whereas others are rejected as artificial, mechanical, commercial or passive.

Throughout the four articles, this understanding of authenticity is repeatedly illuminated and discussed. For example, Article 1 discusses the concept referring to the multitude of vocal outputs heard in star performer Jessie Mueller’s performances, arguing that even from a well-trained musical-vocal ear, it is impossible to judge which of Mueller’s voices are to be defined as “true,” “authentic,” or that with which “she was born.” The article thereby argues that within musical theatre, a *quest for authenticity* morphs into a *pursuit of believability*, as performing the omnivorous voice and vocal omnivorousness gains high status only when knowledge, understanding, and mastery of a variety of musical codes are performed in a *believable* manner. Important in this regard is that the notion of believability brings the listener into the mix, as it is arguably the receiver of a sound who decides what is believable or not, because it is the listener who assigns meaning to a vocal output (Eidsheim, 2019; Mohammed, 2022).

However, the term authenticity is not only used as in connection to questions of what is “true” or “alive” but it is also, for example, as argued by Morton (2015), considered “our ability to see ourselves as distinct beings and have the independence and freedom to make our own choices without subjugating our needs to others” (p. 9). In this regard, Article 4 points out that even though the quest for believability is so central to musical theatre singing and even though the voice’s social side is becoming much more highlighted, utterances and feelings of authenticity as individuality and uniqueness is not left behind in everyday vocal practices. For example, some of the elite voice teachers regarded singing, trying out and searching for a wide variety of sounds to create uniqueness, to be one way of tying together seemingly unlimited external vocal demands in a constantly expanding omnivorous vocal world. Being authentic was, on the one hand, in these interviews linked to honoring the material side of one’s vocal apparatus. However, it was also used to spotlight individuality as a constructed quality, arguing that authenticity is a process—something to develop, train, and make blossom

within voice lessons—not something a singer is born with or into. Consequently, within the omnivorous vocal world of musical theatre, one might argue, that a notion of *stylistic authenticity*—knowing, mastering, and performing the minutiae of various performance practices within a musical style—and a notion of a *personal authenticity*—knowing, mastering, and performing where one’s voice (potentially) uniquely “shines”—are allowed to exist side by side. In addition, traces of a third, co-existing type of authenticity could be found: a sort of *inner authenticity*—a feeling of good or right when acting and performing in line with one’s current artistic agency, values, beliefs, and tastes—a “good” or “right” taking form as feeling of “truth” or “being authentic” in one’s mind and body, even though performing musical theatre is always an act of “play pretend.”

## 2.4 (How) does taste matter in training the musical theatre voice?

Moving into this thesis’s second sub-research question and the role of taste in training musical theatre voice, I will start by posing a question offered by Wright (2015): “What does it mean to be a person of good taste in the early twenty-first century? How does one become one, and why should one bother?” (p. 1). This question seeks to bring attention to how the historical relationship between taste, senses and *morality* has established an idea that good taste is something important to obtain, making it a scene for power play, where good taste pictures the ideal version of a person. Consequently, discussions of tastes are as previously touched upon, communicated through a binary code: good versus bad, right versus wrong, pleasing versus disgusting, or the simple question of “yes or no, did you like it or not?” (Wright, 2015). However, throughout this thesis, it is shown that tastes in contemporary musical theatre do not come in a singular form. Additionally, opportunity is given to explore tasting processes, tasting moments, and tastes’ generative sides.

According to Holding (2022), writing about teaching, learning, and performance for musicians in a so-called “age of brain science”, moments of ignition are crucial in all learning. Before they can pay attention, learners and performers must want to do so. Thus, she argues that the twin of motivation is desire. In other words, emotions, and attachments play an important role in learning: “unless people care enough to expend some effort, they will not learn because they have not attended” (Holding, 2022, p. 142). “Pleasure motivates” Wolf agrees (2007, p. 55), and Article 3 draws attention to how tastes ignite motivation and acts of doing. Here the students remembered joyful episodes where they were “struck” by their encounters with

musical theatre. This remembering was further manifested into so-called “dream roles,” which in turn held implications for how they trained their voices in the present.

As described in the introduction of this thesis, a core concept in Complete Vocal Technique is the separation of taste and technique, and CVT considers it part of our job as vocal teachers not to impose our taste on the singer; this is to make sure that it is an audible, *desired* outcome the performers entrain into their bodies. As prior headmaster of the Norwegian Academy of Music, Peter Tornquist once remarked in a social media post: “Why should I sing arias? Why should I sing romances in a foreign language? There are good reasons for doing this, but because your teacher says so is not one of them” [own translation]. Musicians’ overall mental and physical well-being is becoming an increasing concern in the musical (theatre) profession (Bartleet et al., 2019) and feeling empowered to control one’s own artistic path may be a part of securing such well-being.

Even though this thesis focuses mainly on the potential of—and the reflexivity involved in—moments where people expand or surpass their tasting history, the thesis does not argue that the concept of taste is never used as a social weapon or in judgment of the judger. For example, Article 3 raises the question of whether it is possible to perform a previously untasted sound or to learn a song without simultaneously learning some aesthetic conventions of the sung. As David Fielder, my fellow voice teacher at the Kristiania University College, argued in his trial interview (see section 4.4): “I wish I could say I teach without taste or bias. But every time I demonstrate a sound in my lessons or ask my students to listen to how a certain singer performs or forms, for example, a phrase or a certain vocal behavior, I demonstrate taste.”<sup>20</sup> Here Fielder touches upon the notion that there is no exploration without becoming generative, also when it comes to matters of taste or singing. “Singing is a sonic citational practice,” Asare (2020b) argues: “In the act of producing vocal sound, one implicitly cites the vocal acts of the teacher from whom one has learned the song” (p. 51). Arguably, what we cite in learning to sing is often our teachers’ own taste patterns, their attachments, and feelings of “good and right.” Gherardi (2009) even goes so far as to argue that all practices are a matter of taste. Practice is more than a set of activities, she avers; it is always a question of what is “aesthetically fitting within a community of practitioners—a preference for ‘the way we do things together’” (p. 535).

Therefore, I argue that questions of “whose taste matters” must be brought to the forefront of pedagogical contexts because teachers or professors may so easily act as so-called *tastekeepers* (Dyndahl et al., 2017), or in my words, dominant *taste-performers*, “regulating forces with

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20 This quote is in its English translation approved by Dr. Fielder through personal correspondence on October 25, 2022.

regard to how musical genres and styles are considered appropriate to elevate and institutionalise” (Skårberg & Karlsen, 2021, p. 98). In the essay, *In defense of pleasure*, Wolf (2007) describes this tendency—and how she breaks with it:

While I might have considered it my duty as a professor to provide their entrée into the categorization of high art, to acculturate them to value the intellectual capital that the university provides and values, I decided rather to build on their tastes and draw on their preferences as a basis for inquiry. Their refusal of the cultural hierarchies I (and my colleagues) have naturalized and take for granted allowed my students and me to think about pleasure, to talk about affect, and use our visceral engagement with musicals as a crucial part of our analysis. (p. 52)

Wolf’s reflections further resonate with the writings of Burnard et al. (2015):

Music teachers in classrooms also represent their own musical (and taste) values, which are reflected in their personal pedagogies. For young people [...], music becomes an important part of their identity formation. Music teachers are confronted on a daily basis with musical standpoints, which harmonize or disharmonize, with their own values. Therefore, it becomes important for music teachers to reflect on their own musical values. (p. 5)

Relating back to the link between taste and artistic agency, I argue that voice teachers and (higher) music(al theatre) education must provide space for the students to explore and build the courage to trust their senses and sensations, to offer their opinions on aesthetic questions, and to know that they are allowed to negotiate part of a musical style, genre, or a tradition’s current performance practices and values. I believe students need to experience that they have a say in what they build into their bodies as well as when they are “merely” in the process of becoming performers. In other words, teachers need to create a so-called social “borderless space” (in Norwegian, *frirom*), where imagination, contradictions, ambivalence is set in motion to explore what could be possible beyond what we know or tend to do at one specific moment in time (Nielsen, 2004). In his writings, Hennion proposes the following approach to provide such space:

The first step is returning the body of the taster, treated as an accomplishment, to the scene. In comparing wine and music but also in comparing more far-flung objects like the climber’s canyon, the footballer’s field, or even the singer’s voice, we effectively capture all the delicate work that must be deployed in order to become sensitive to the differences that matter. That work—on the self, on one’s body, and



one's spirit—has to be done both in the moment and over the long term. (Hennion, 2017a, p. 117)

Hennion sometimes describes this work as a *pause*, as a gesture to install, which creates an ongoing interest (see, e.g., Hennion, 2007). Within the field of voice studies, Eidsheim (2019) also speaks of the pause to “indicate anything from a sense of expansion of the mental, intellectual, and emotional space to nonautomatic reflections about meaning. In short, the pause is not about listening for a greater degree of accuracy but about attending from a state that can help interrupt the way we usually listen” (p. 182). Linking these thoughts of empowerment back to the methodological choices of this thesis, I argue that one can orchestrate such a pause by initiating projects such as *Aktuelt emne*, where time to pause, explore, and reflect is of the essence. In the words of Yosef, one of the musical theatre students:

As a musical theatre performer, I believe most of the job consists of getting an assignment and then executing it. I think it is rarely the case that a performer is invited into the process of finding out why things are as they are or how things could be. We are mostly used to learning the truths within the profession and then performing within the frames given to us. I therefore find it exciting to play-wise. Not to be misunderstood, I did not want to pretend to be able to do things I can't—but more to give myself the title as experienced and as one that matters [...] One challenge for us as “researching agents” is our little knowledge of how the [musical theatre] business operates and thinks around us. For example, when it comes to gender roles and the exploration of genres, we, of course, play a part [in future values and practices] but more like an input. We don't decide what the world is willing to accept [...], but what we can do is explore, discuss, reflect, and dream about what outcomes we eventually could or will be a part of. (von Germeten, 2023b)

## **2.5 Taste and the formation of vocal-musical genres, styles, and traditions**

Musical theatre performers and teachers are constantly experimenting with the range and boundaries of sounds the human voice can produce while actively, openly, and consciously attaching themselves to a wide variety of styles and genres. Consequently, exploring the pluralities of voice in musical theatre may offer insight into how musical (vocal) genres, styles, and traditions are being formed—or, in other words, using musicals as site and context allows us to explore the problems and characteristics of genres (Savran, 2004; Wolf, 2007).

Article 3 argues that vocal genres, styles, and idioms take form as aesthetic and sonic norms when they have survived and are developed over a long period of time and across geographical space. However, the article also underlines that such longevity or broadness of impact does not imply that genres are universal or that they operate within static aesthetical borders. To support its case, the article offers examples of how genres, styles, and idioms are becoming stable and time-crossing when *made stable* by their actors—in this case, by musical theatre performers through embodied practices of singing. Genres are thus to be seen as a result of negotiation and attachment, making vocal-musical genres and styles a sort of ontological potential that must be brought into being—that is, they are something that we may or may not constitute. In other words, genres, styles, and idioms are created backward through stabilizing acts in the present (Hennion & Fauquet, 2001), rendering their boundaries both complex and fluid (Savage and Gayo, 2011).

The reasons for bringing or negotiating specific sounds and styles into being are multifarious. One reason could be to secure vocal health; in other words, a vocal idiom may be a result of negotiating with the voice's material side. For example, performing a note in the high part of the voice, at great volume, in the vocal mode of Edge (as, for example, heard in *Dreamgirls* (Krieger, 2006) and the song "I am telling you") requires a specific narrowing of the vocal tract and distinct twang to secure the vocal mode and perform it sustainably (McGlashan et al., 2017; Sadolin, 2021). Consequently, we must avoid or alter certain vowels and we cannot add audible air to the sound, because the latter would ask the vocal folds to execute two different vocal fold vibrational patterns simultaneously. Such physical conditions and "rules" may frequently be encountered—for example, in Motown music—as a way for the human voice to be heard and performed in a sustainable manner in the presence of high-intensity electronic instruments, drums, or a large horn section (especially in times when vocal microphones were not as efficient as they are today). Traits of such performance practices may, however, also be reproduced as a vocal-musical idiom belonging to the style, even if a song is then performed in an acoustic setting or under other musical circumstances.

Article 3, however, illustrates how what we value, perform, and then entrain into our bodies—in other words, our *tastes*—play a major part in stabilizing or challenging established sonic norms, traditions, or styles. The article thus argues that for audiences love a performance, musical theatre performers must have loved first by performing acts of valuated (vocal) behaviors. The story of Sarah (as seen in the article), arguably, exemplifies such an argument. Sarah was learning and entraining the stylistic tradition of so-called legit musical theatre singing; however, she came to break many "rules" of the style's established performance conduct in the heat-of-the-moment and in the form of an emotional outburst. In my assessment, this made her—and her character of Sybille—highly believable as a person of flesh and blood,

speaking her truth or being true to her so-called “inner authenticity”. Her performance felt good and right to me, which would make me—if I were, for example, casting the show—hire her on behalf of others. In other words, her performance spoke to my tastes, showcasing the “right” amount of rebelliousness at just the “right” moment in time. I would therefore attach myself to this vocal behavior and would likely measure and compare all later performances of that piece to Sarah’s interpretation. In other words, this performance would hold me just as much as I hold it. However, in our working together, I also acknowledged that this exact performance could have been the reason she would *not* be hired by others with different tastes and attachments. Nevertheless, what Sarah chose to do or not do in her future performances of this piece would either stabilize or challenge this style’s vocal tradition. In a similar manner, so too would my attachments, as I would likely encourage that type of rebelliousness in all my future teachings or musical directions of that song. Thus, Sarah’s example resonates not only with the writings of Hennion (2007, 2017c, 2019) but also with those of Frith (1996), who argues that “social groups [do not] agree upon values which are then expressed in their cultural activities [...] but that they only get to know themselves as *groups* [...] through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. Making music isn’t a way of expressing ideas, it is a way of living them” (p. 111, emphasis in original). In other words, a musical style or genre is not only formed, informed, or created by measures of craft or tradition; there is also taste, attachment, spontaneity, and passion involved.

The higher the status of the performer who lives newly, breaks with, or expands an artistic tradition or style—arguably, the more impactful it will be to a style’s development. But how do we know which of our students—or of us teachers—will be in such an impactful position at some point or another? I therefore argue that it is a matter of equity to provide, nurture, and share (artistic) agency where possible in an educational setting so that, for example, musical theatre performers do not unconsciously reproduce what happens to be standard or expected but rather that they, in the words of Eidsheim (2019), “choose which world to make” (p. 184); in other words, I believe it is important and right to make “goals of hope and emancipation central to any curriculum” (Eidsheim, 2019, p. 57).

Early on, this thesis began with a story about the agency of dead composers; however, I want to make clear that I do not claim that stabilizing artistic practices into genres, styles, or idioms is only a power move made within a negative realm. On the contrary, I find “true beauty” in humans’ ability to practice the nitty-gritty work involved in making artistic genres or styles come alive. I believe there is beauty in creating patterns of practices so meaningful that for years to come, people spend their time reproducing or working on mastering, knowing, feeling, and understanding their many subtleties. Still, I emphasize that I believe it is both ethical and fruitful to offer our students—and ourselves as teachers—an understanding of genres and

styles as an ontological potentiality that must be brought and negotiated into being between the past, the present, and the future; between the individual and the collective; between a brain *knowing* and a body *feeling* (or the other way around). Musical theatre is also a live art form; it is ephemeral, and in spite of every recording, every idea of a coherent industry sound, or every musical convention, it is a performance that must be re-made to exist (referring Hennion, 2015; Cook, 2014). Consequently, a vocal performance or a vocal idiom will never be exactly repeated, and they will always be mixed with a singer's biomechanical traits, tastes, understandings, and contexts. In other words, vocal-musical styles are an approximate array of sounds—a potential conceptual framework—to play with and within.

## 2.6 Expanding (vocal) omnivorousness beyond genre and style

Up until now, the main focal point of this thesis has been how musical theatre performers gorge on and attach themselves to a wide variety of vocal genres and styles to come alive and, in turn, how these vocal genres and styles conjointly gorge on and attach themselves to musical theatre performers and performances to come alive as genres and styles. However, as the four articles have shown, musical theatre performers change their vocal outputs for more than musical and stylistic purposes. For example, they alter their vocal apparatus to denote or identify specific characters, especially when performing dual or plural castings within one show, or to convey different emotional affects and psychological states (Benson et al., 2020; Kayes, 2015; Flynn, 2022).

According to Eidsheim (2019), listeners—be they audience members, voice teachers, or singers listening to themselves—always ask the *acousmatic question*,<sup>21</sup> *who is this?* when hearing someone singing or speaking. This question may arise from an assumption that voice, as previously discussed, is an a priori and stable in nature, and that we from this stable nature may glean “essential” information about the speaker, be it broader identity markers such as class, race or gender, or more fine-grained information about health, mood or emotion (Eidsheim, 2019). Within the history of musical theatre, omnivorousness has arguably been performed and manifested in line with such assumptions. For example, for a musical or vocal citation to work as a subtext, it must rely on relatively stable, immediately accessible, and instantly recognizable audible categorizations of musical genres and styles (see Article 1). This makes musical theatre constitute and reproduce associations about people and sounds that become

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21 The acousmatic question is originated within electronic music and concerns the “particular affordances of a particular historical—technical moment” (Eidsheim, 2019, p. 2).

“increasingly potent as cultural habits become ingrained, and as popular music uses stereotypical signifiers to shortcut meanings” (Taylor and Symonds, 2014, p. 32).

Acousmatic assumptions are found within the field area of teaching musical theatre voice—for example, as seen in the writings of Popeil (2007):

Each belt sound conveys particular personality traits. Heavy belt can convey age, world-weariness, and anger. Nasal belt is often used for the heightened projection it provides and can convey matter-of-factness and conviction. Twangy belt combines strong ring and nasality and is the most penetrating of the belting types. It is superb for comedic, shrill, or dominating characters. Brassy belt is the original belting sound, popularized by Ethel Merman—also ringy and nasal but, unlike twangy belt, with the emphasis on nasal resonance. This style is perfect for confident, mature characters. (p. 78)

This thesis argues that such statements do not express the nature, stability, or truths about sound or people. Quite the opposite, such utterances are defined as so-called “chains of associations” made by the individual in that individual’s social and cultural context (Eidsheim, 2019; Fischer-Lichte, 2008). Thus (as advocated in Article 2), returning the acousmatic question back to the listener is pivotal. This is accomplished by asking: “Who am I, who hears this?” (Eidsheim, 2019, p. 24) and “Why do I hear this person in this way?” (p. 30). According to Eidsheim (2019), by asking these questions, we move from an “analysis of sound to an analysis of *how that sound is listened to*” (p. 25) and become able to “trace voice back to ideas” (Eidsheim, 2009, p. 27). In other words, we approach a human voice as a situated snapshot of a much more extensive collection of possible vocal aesthetics and vocal behaviors. We also thereby acknowledge that any given audible sound is ascribed to a certain vocal practice and that a voice may be entrained into any style—whether classical, soul, or rock—or any style associated with identities, such as woman, man, Norwegian, or working-class (Eidsheim, 2019). Accordingly, when and if we choose to name or categorize a vocal output, we understand and emphasize that this is an act of human-made associations and should be practical—that is, *pragmatically* argued and reasoned: “I give this thing—this singing—this name because I believe it might be beneficial for this specific situation in time and space.”

### 2.6.1 Musical theatre voice and White supremacy

Scholars like Eidsheim claim that we can know vocal identities only in their multidimensionality, unfolding practices and processes. Thus, teaching in line with an omnivorous voice view might draw a parallel between the thick event of singing and the thick event of the

person singing. However, as argued in Article 4, however, Broadway and the musical theatre community is not considered a very diverse community, when it comes issues such as race. For example, all the voice teachers interviewed in this thesis are White, and as expressed by Flynn (2022b), “there is still so much room for growth in the way non-White stories are told in American musical theatre” (p. 11).

Article 1 paid attention to the history of omnivorousness in musical theatre with regards to the topic of *cultural appropriation*. There, “appropriation” was understood to mean the performance by privileged people of customs, practices, or ideas originating within less privileged societies or cultural groups. Not only the history of written works, but also the history of voice within musical theatre, carries such a trajectory of appropriation and consequently also critique. This is, for example, explored by Asare (2020b), who critiques, amongst other things, “the myth of the “natural belter” that obscures the lessons Broadway performers have drawn from the blues women’s sound” (p. 51). Acknowledging White supremacy’s strong ties with musical theatre—as well as with vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics—is an important part of contemporary musical theatre debates, especially within the American musical theatre scene. Part of this debate requires acknowledging one’s own privileges and bias and, as previously argued, asking oneself, *who am I who hears this voice this way?* In writing this thesis, I acknowledge that I, my students, and many of my “worked with” scholars—such as Hennion—write from a place of privilege. I—a White, cis-gendered Norwegian woman—am privileged because, among other advantages, I have grown up in a country where I receive free higher education and because I am employed to write, focus, learn, and deep-dive into the nitty gritty state of vocal aesthetics in musical theatre. My skin color or sexuality has also never been an issue when entering the musical theatre profession here in Norway or elsewhere. I am also privileged in the sense that when I wanted to continue my vocal training beyond the free conservatoire sphere, a rather successful artistic career combined with good-willed employers and public grants made it possible for me to keep on learning.

In a similar way, my students are privileged because they, whether by their own means or by collaborating with the state of Norway, are able to enter and pay the fees musical theatre training requires and because they have had access to training before entering their bachelor’s degree program. Hennion is arguably privileged in that he is a White male from a strong tradition of French thinkers and is given time and money to contemplate, write, and publish—be it about loving wine or loving music. In other words, the opportunity to be in the room of any academic discussion is already a privilege in itself. Therefore, moving outside and beyond the timeframe and scope of this thesis, I would argue that there is value in connecting vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice even more back to the roots of Peterson and Bourdieu to explore and gain further knowledge on who (students, performers or teachers)

is privileged enough to be in the room where the omnivorous voice is made to blossom—and furthermore to search for answers or understandings on why such privileges are unevenly distributed in today’s (musical theatre) society. In the article, *What do we do with the musical theatre canyon?*, Wolf et al. (2021), for example, ask the following of their readers:

As you reflect on the chapters that follow, I ask that you continue to grapple with big questions that interrogate the history of the musical theatre, the present moment, and the possibilities for the future of the musical. Who has made musical theatre and for what audiences? Who has been left out? What are the stories that have been told? What are the stories that are not being told and need to be told? [...] Why has the form thrived? Why has it fallen short in creating an anti-racist and equitable field? How has the musical theatre been an agent of change? How has it reinforced white supremacy?

Article 4, however, also argues that the pause imposed by the pandemic—as well as newer musical theatre works, such as *Hamilton* or *A Strange Loop*—have contributed in some degree to more race- or color-conscious casting practices and awareness of racial issues within contemporary musical theatre. In the article, abandoning the limitations of casting for more traditional shows into specific race categorizations—such as by hiring an Asian Evan or a Black Glinda—was seen as bringing new ways of being and new patterns of sound to the musical theatre stage. Additionally, these days (especially within a US context), statements like the following are frequently seen and posted:

If a song was written for a character with a specific race or ethnicity, a singer should bring great thought and care into deciding whether it is appropriate for them to sing this song. Furthermore, it is not appropriate for a white singer to sing a song written for characters that are Black, Indigenous, or other people of color [...] just as songs can be written for singers of specific racial and/or ethnic identities, the same can be said for gender. If a song is written for a trans or non-binary character, it is important that a cisgender singer not sing the song. (Flynn, 2022b, p. 213)

Within the context of Norway, these, maybe sometimes uncomfortable but important, discussions are only in their infancy. For example, questions of vocal cultural appropriation or appropriateness of repertoire were not addressed in the AR-inspired study in this thesis at the time the study was conducted. Here, *Hamilton* was one of the musicals explored, even though most of the students involved—and I as their voice teacher—identify as White.

## 2.6.2 Gender-neutral voice training

Articles 3 and 4 also introduced issues of gender and sound, as well as the idea of *gender-neutral voice training*, arguing that vocal technique today should be tailored to the size of the individual's vocal apparatus and aimed at specific desired auditory outcomes, instead of obeying standardized ideas of how certain categories—for example, men and women—“should” sound. In other words, the idea of a gender-neutral voice training builds on a notion that “while sound itself has no gender, sound in society has been gendered (Flynn, 2022b, p. 174). Today, most voice work is written under a binary code of gendered voice terminology, leaving little room for performers to identify otherwise (Accetta, 2022; Flynn, 2022b). Furthermore, writings and research on voice seldom consider the considerable area of overlap when it comes to so-called male and female voices, imposing categorizations of voice—such as a soprano or a bass—based on the outer area of such gender spectra (Eidsheim, 2019). Rebelling against such prescriptions, Flynn argues, “A larynx is a larynx is a larynx” (2022b, p. 173); all healthy larynges have the same anatomical parts, no matter the gender identity of the human attached to the larynx. Further, a larynx can be smaller or larger, depending on the size of the body or, for example, the hormones present. Thus, it can be argued that omnivorous vocal methods—that is, methods aiming to include all sounds the human voice is capable of making into training—offer the possibility of creating meaningful training for non-binary gendered singers, as well as securing individuality of sound and gender for every singer in the musical theatre profession.

Musical theatre work has also historically operated firmly within a gender-binary realm, with roles and shows often reaffirming traditional societal gender roles. However, *genderbending*—performing roles that originally written for another gender—became a common thread throughout the AR-inspired study in this thesis. Genderbending was also the area where the students most actively broke with established vocal conventions within the profession (see Article 3). When performing “Chant” from *Hadestown*, two men were cast as the female First and Second Fates, and two female singers joined Alexander Hamilton's crew, allowing more girls to rap—not just sing—in the musical. Furthermore, in the sheet music we used for all four musicals, most ensemble parts were not written as traditionally gendered soprano, alto, tenor, or bass constellations but were marked groups of “company” or “workers.” Thus, the scores did not offer excessive information about what kinds of voices or genders should perform what parts. During the study, it became apparent that the choice of sound color and idiosyncratic range possibilities across gender categorizations blended out more traditional notions of what a choir divided into specific groups of men and women “should sound like.” This openness, furthermore, highlighted that the sound of a voice may not automatically identify a body's gender; instead, all voicings were decided by negotiation between the pianist



present, the students, and me. We based our decisions on the concrete circumstances and the aims of the performance: *These voices are available, these are the characters present, these are the chords written in the score, and these are the words spoken.* In addition, we based our voicings on what felt good and right; in other words, we based them on our tastes.

Thus, in this thesis, gender-neutral voice teaching, as well as more race- and color-conscious casting, is seen to expand the wide variety of vocal aesthetics and vocal behaviors within contemporary musical theatre beyond the plurality of musical genre and styles gorged on. In other words, both of these “new-found” practices are examples of social elements, values, and phenomena making the musical theatre’s omnivorous voice even more so.

## **2.7 Teaching and learning the omnivorous voice: Toward vocal eclecticism or a vocal specialization of its own?**

Approaching the end of this thesis and returning to this its main research question (*How can the pluralities of vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics within contemporary musical theatre—and implicitly the human voice itself—be understood and maneuvered through a conceptual framework of the omnivorous voice?*), the four published articles have shown that thinking in pluralities is part of musical theatre performers’ and musical theatre voice teachers’ everyday lives. According to Edwin (2005), “Broadway seems to be more adaptable to musical change than the greater voice teaching community” (p. 291), even though the anthology *Teaching singing in the 21st century* (Harrison & O’Bryan, 2014) proclaims that “diversity is the buzzword of the century” for all voice teachers (p. 6), and being a voice teacher today means not specializing but rather knowing, understanding, and appreciating diverse musical styles from a range of origins. Therefore, “all” voice teachers should be broad and diverse in showing, knowing, and doing.

To contribute to such competencies, this thesis has sought to present new knowledge of what is termed the human voice’s social side, and on how to understand and maneuver pluralities of voice through the concept of the omnivorous voice. The theoretical outline and background for such a concept is described in chapter four; however, its understandings have evolved and become increasingly “fine-meshed” through exploring its workings in and through the frames of the four articles. Therefore, stepping into the final stages of this thesis, vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous human voice itself may now be described in the following manner:

- 1) Omnivorousness is to be regarded as a fundamental (ontological) potential of the human voice; in other words, how we sound, or sing is not a predetermined matter but instead a result of a broad pattern of available or unavailable sounds (aesthetics) and vocal behaviors we attach or not attach ourselves to within our vocal becomings;
- 2) Thus, the concept of the omnivorous voice posits that vocal outputs are vocal behaviors created in dialogue or gorging on current aesthetical trends, tastes, traditions, and valuations. The human voice also embodies the possibility of switching between, or being re-assembled, through vocal training—formal or informal, explicit or implicit—when faced with changing vocal demands or wishes;
- 3) Consequently, vocal technique is to be defined as repeated, audible targeted doings, divisible into bits and pieces, combinable with one's or others' aesthetic preferences and valuations;
- 4) Furthermore, expanding or carrying out the omnivorous potential of a voice may be seen as a high-status way to, for example, respond to high-pressure vocal demands or ensure performers' employability in an ever-changing, highly competitive vocal-musical (theatre) market;
- 5) Additionally, assembling or expanding the omnivorous voice has the potential to foster vocal creativity and enable complex vocal aesthetical expressions to perform uniqueness, believability, or so-called authenticity as well;
- 6) Simultaneously, performing and training in line with an omnivorous voice view—in other words, training “the whole voice”—may be a way to secure vocal health and vocal sustainability;
- 7) However, this omnivorous potential or ability of our vocal apparatus is always in negotiation with the material, emotional, and other social sides of our bodies and beings, as we simultaneously have a voice, are a voice, and become a voice through and in our vocal doings;
- 8) Nonetheless, performing or teaching in line with an omnivorous voice view may enable, foster, and empower vocal artistic agency and has the potential to break with society's expectations of what a voice “should” sound like with regards to categorizations such as race, gender, sexuality, class, body type.

In sum, the concept of the omnivorous voice and the phenomenon of vocal omnivorousness therefore express the volume, intensity, and intricacy of the vocal aesthetics and vocal behaviors involved when performing, for example, contemporary musical theatre voice.

The most “hardcore” vocal omnivores described in this thesis are likely the musical theatre voice teachers. As stated by one of the interviewees, “We teach how you are going to use your voice for whatever you are going to use it for.” However, recent studies, such as Naismith (2022), show that there are still borders to what voice teachers will or will not teach, also within musical theatre. In other words, vocal omnivorousness remains connected to processes of inclusion and exclusion. In Naismith’s interview study, which involved renowned musical theatre voice teachers as Gilyanne Kayes and Jeanette LoVetri, eight out of nine voice teachers across popular musical styles argued that there were styles of singing they do not accommodate. This exclusion was explained by the argument that they “were unaware or did not understand the parameters, did not have empathy for a particular style, or they had not yet developed an approach to teaching that style” (p. 193). The genres not taught were identified as rap, heavy metal, death metal, overtone singing, and country—as well as singing styles that use excess or extreme vocal effects. Interestingly, these genres are the same genres commonly excluded from general omnivorous aptitudes or musical gentrification processes as well (Dyndahl et al., 2021). In Naismith’s study, knowledge and beliefs about teaching or singing such genres or styles were nonetheless also highlighted as changing. As described by one of the interviewees:

There was a time when I might have said all of these things are wrong, but now we know that is not the case because we have the instrumentation, we can see people doing the vocal effects, and most distortion is produced by something else flapping in the vocal tract. It’s just an interference with the frequency. (Naismith, 2022, p. 202)

In my interview study, to operationalize their demanding, omnivorous teaching task, some of the six elite voice teachers argued in favor of viewing genres and vocal styles as continuums where vocal styles were analyzed, embodied, and understood as *patterns of sounds*—as well as where vocal idioms and vocal behaviors were categorizable by their similarities, not only by their differences. In doing so, they were embracing the idea that no style is an island and advocating the benefits of not dividing vocal training into specific genre brackets. One might therefore argue that instead using the term *cross-training* in reference to the musical theatre voice (see section 2.5) we could instead say that we are *continuum-training* it. By such thinking, the body’s plasticity (its ability to change, re-form, and expand) as well as the brain’s neuroplasticity (its ability to myelinate new pathways) is turned into active, creative, and artistic vocal tools. As explained by one student in the AR-inspired study: “Flexibility is what I wish for—and what I work towards—to be my product” (von Germeten, 2022a).

Thoughts like these are not necessarily new in the history of voice, even though they are not necessarily widespread, either. Already in Reid (1975), voice teachers were encouraged to

distinguish between art and the function of voice, where art is to be considered the use of skill and imagination used in creating things of beauty, whereas function is to be considered the action characteristic of a mechanical or organic system. Reid also argues that a functionally trained voice will have a broad range of expression and can therefore serve the art, making some aspects of voice training even considered universal.<sup>22</sup> Bartlett (2020) follows this latter argumentation, asking “what if teachers were trained to consider genre differences as complementary rather than oppositional?” (p. 187). According to her, this way of thinking would build voices without borders and assist singers in developing the whole voice first, thereby further facilitating the freedom to sing healthily in many styles. In a similar vein, Benson (2018) argues, “if stylistic specialization is affiliated with repertoire, rather than with the voice itself, there may be a shift toward inclusivity among voice pedagogues and voice programs” (p. 13).

## 2.8 Musicalification of voice in contemporary musical theatre

Although working toward mastering omnivorousness may allow the body to expand to do more than we thought it originally could, there is, arguably also a risk that one might not reach the optimal level in any of the styles practiced (LoVetri, 2019). Even though high-level and believable omnivorous vocal performers are numerous in today’s musical theatre scene (see Article 1 for the case of Jessie Mueller, or Article 3 for the case of Lindsay Mendez), being an unlimited, ever-changeable, ever-ready vocal omnivore might be a high-pressure, time- and energy-consuming achievement, whereby working toward an ever-expanding omnivorous musical theatre voice may cause the original genres that are being embodied or gorged on to be modified, altered, or even “musicalificated” in the process.

*Musicalification* is, in this context, a term indicating that by adding the suffix “-fication” (from the Italian *fiacre*: “to make”) to the noun “musical,” one can highlight what is likely an ongoing process of making—or refracting—a musical genre or style into a musical theatre version of that style. Article 1 connects this refraction to a Bourdieusian logic, whereby *refraction* is recognized as a strong capacity for absorption and transformation—in other words, “the effect of translation” that the specific logic of a particular art field “imposes on external influences or commissions” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 220). In other words, musicalification of a voice may lead to vocal practices where only the minimum of vocal stylistic references and idioms

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22 To offer an example, vibrato is a vocal behavior—in CVT defined as an excess vocal effect—seen used in a wide variety of vocal styles and genres such as jazz, opera, legit musical theatre, or country. The training involved in producing vibrato is thus not linked to any specific style, and singers train the function of vibrato agnostically to style, and then apply as much or as little as is called for in their chosen musical genre (Benson, 2018).

of the original genres and styles are incorporated, resulting either in an eclectic<sup>23</sup> aptitude towards teaching and learning vocal-musical styles, or in a process that makes musical theatre singing *musical theatre* singing. As my student Scott asked, “are we really that omnivorous?”

Johnson et al. (2019) writes about this tendency as well, arguing that “there exists a persistent sentiment among fans and scholars of popular music that something does get lost in translation when musicals engage popular music styles [...]. Voices singing rock, blues or rap mean one thing, but those same voices and songs have come to mean something else entirely when moved to the theatrical stage” (p. 35). In his writings, Johnson (2019) labels such a musicalification of voice “the Broadway sound,” claiming that “for all the widely varying musical styles erupting onto Broadway over the past several decades—from pop to rock, to hip hop, blues, and country—at the center of that apparent variety lies a specific quality of vocal sound so ubiquitous that it is paid little attention” (p. 475). Johnson (2019) further argues that the stylistic intricacy of the various implemented styles and genres may be downplayed by musical theatre’s other features, such as the combination of singing, dancing, and acting.

According to Edwards and Hoch (2018), many contemporary musical theatre shows do find acting more important than singing, sometimes resulting in the hiring of good actors instead of good singers—a common critique in and around the Norwegian musical theatre scene as well. As Asare (2022) spotlights:

The singing voice in a musical is always connected to technique but also to character and dramatic circumstances. When spoken dialogue turns the corner into song and words become lyrics, the act of singing does not simply continue the act of speaking but transforms it entirely. (p. 54)

Willson and Callaghan (2010) provide a list of what can be named an “industry expectation” or “industry standard” for musical theatre singing. Overall, they characterize such singing as speechlike in character, with middle to high positioning of the larynx, where clear articulation is more important than a so-called beautiful tone; accents and everyday language are implemented; vibrato is only used as a vocal effect; and acting is imperative. In other words, these are traits commonly added to all vocal styles. Vocal efficacy and stamina are also of great importance within the profession (related to the number of performances expected during a show’s lifespan), which may be also contribute to a musicalification and perhaps a “smoothness” of sound and of vocal styles in musical theatre.

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23 Eclecticism is often presented as an alternative conceptualization of broad taste patterns. However, the concept is also rejected and criticized for failing to capture the importance of “increased volume and intensity of cultural engagement” (Hazir & Warde, 2016: 77).

In the AR-inspired part of this thesis, the students identified rap as the genre and performance style most difficult to embody. In my field notes, I argued that the most challenging threshold to cross for many of the students was between classical idioms and techniques on the one side, and “all the other” popular styles on the other. Again, these tendencies reminded us that performing vocal omnivorousness in a high-status, believable, and sustainable manner is time-consuming and not necessarily without borders within one person’s mind, body, and soul. It is also a process that requires substantial recourses, both financial and in terms of access. As argued by LoVetri, albeit in somewhat harsh terms, “to really train the voice well in multiple styles [...], takes time, years. I think that if you don’t take time, you end up with cheap singing or vocal and musical issues that can become deliberating. Taking time allows the instrument to acclimatize to the diversity of vocal production” (interviewed by Naismith, 2022, p. 203). Nonetheless, as experienced in our four-week AR-inspired study, when working steadily and in a reflexive manner, we managed to dissolve not only technical challenges, but also a sort of ironic distance towards some performance styles. Furthermore, and as seen through my years of experience with voice-training, how long “taking time” actually is will vary immensely from performer to performer and situation to situation. Sometimes, the right vocal tool or the right pedagogical clue can move mountains in one singing lesson; other times, strong muscle memory, deeply embedded emotions, inherited ideas, or thoroughly trained techniques may continue to haunt a performer for years.

The path forward for voice in musical theatre may, in many ways, be considered a plethora of possible turn of events, as an further increase in omnivorousness on the level of the art form may come about as the sum of either omnivorous individual taste patterns or as diversity of tastes and practices measured on a group level (van Eijck, 2001). On the one hand, we may face even more high-status vocal omnivores engaged in the art of continuum-training, whereby mastering, teaching, and performing vocal omnivorousness denotes a specific type of performer or teacher, an artistic expertise, a personal trademark, or a vocal specialization with its own terms. Another scenario would be that we will return to a form of “univorous” vocal specialization as the styles presented in new shows and revivals continue to multiply, perhaps so much so that omnivorousness expectations are no longer achievable or possible to perform sustainably or in a believable manner. Vocal omnivorousness may thereby maybe turn into a state of the educational process, where students explore various styles, and then decide which styles and sounds they do best and specialize accordingly (Howard, 2007).

### 3 Concluding remarks

This thesis has also shown that the pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics, and vocal tastes within musical theatre voice are formed and founded by a conglomeration of stylistic, philosophical, geographical, societal, and personal traditions and values—elements both overlapping and separate. It has also shown that, much like musical theatre, vocal pedagogy is a changing discipline—reflective, responsive and highly intertwined with the time and place in which it is practiced. Thus, despite the many and multifaceted ideas generated in the four articles and in this extended summary, I acknowledge that this study has raised certain issues that is changing or warrant more attention than is possible within the confines of this thesis. Nonetheless, the aim of this final chapter of my thesis is to enumerate its contributions and identify its potential implications for future research within the fields of music education, cultural sociology, musicology, and voice studies.

#### 3.1 Contributions to, and implications for, the field of music education

This thesis makes several contributions to contemporary music education and performing arts pedagogies. Most notably, it examines practices, approaches, and principles of musical theatre voice, thereby filling knowledge gaps in an underexplored area of the field. As commented by the peer reviewers of Article 3, published in *Research Studies in Music Education*: “It’s great to see the teaching of musical theatre being explored and documented in this way, so congratulations on investigating this oft-neglected genre—at least in terms of thorough research” (Reviewer 1), and “this is a really innovative article that identifies an unusual community (musical theatre students and teachers)” (Reviewer 2).

As argued throughout the thesis, it is the context that will decide when and if aiming for vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice is to be set into motion. Nevertheless, I argue that merely acknowledging omnivorousness as a fundamental potential of the human voice opens a growth mindset within vocal pedagogies. This thesis has thereby sought to make contribution to music education with regards to how we define, describe, understand, and maneuver the human voice. However, the thesis also leaves behind a trail of unanswered questions: How far can a human voice expand—on the one hand, with regards to the material limitations of the body and the vocal apparatus—and on the other hand, with regards to a performer’s well-being and sense of (artistic) self? Are some genre or aesthetic borders harder to cross than others (from social—as well as physical—side understandings of voice)? And,

is the omnivorous potential of the human voice the same, regardless of the gender assigned at birth, despite emerging ideas of gender-neutral voice training?

To the field of music education, this thesis also contributes by introducing a theoretical framework of the so-called new cultural sociology to the field, by incorporating thoughts on taste as defined by Hennion. These thoughts help highlighting the role of taste in artistic processes as well as formal, systematic pedagogies. In other words, the use of Hennion's theories within music education focuses attention onto the performative, corporal, and unpredictable dimensions of taste, rather than reducing taste to a condition that already exists prior to an individual's engagement with a specific artwork or specific practices.

Finally, this thesis contributes to music education by arguing for the benefits and necessity of aural analysis and aural/oral learning methods when maneuvering, learning, and teaching the many songs of musical theatre, but also in other fields beyond musical theatre voice. This is in line with Fisher et al. (2019), who asserted that "careful listening and thoughtful imitation of archetypal artists are valuable approaches in the quest for mastery in fast-changing modern culture" (p. 724). Consequently, I argue that reflexive listening skills and aurally based mimicry are pedagogically viable—even desirable—tools within teaching and learning voice. I hope that in this regard, Article 2 will be a valid input that opens new avenues to explore ideas and practices for teaching these elements in higher music(al theatre) education.

### **3.2 Contributions to, and implications for, the field of cultural sociology**

This thesis has stridently argued that taste is a matter of cultural production and artistic processes, as well as an underexplored field of research within cultural sociology. Throughout the thesis, it is argued that musicians (in this case, musical theatre performers) must be seen as musical lovers—for audiences to have performances or objects to love, the performers must love first, performing acts of tastes and valued (vocal) behaviors. Furthermore, it is argued that taste impacts and forms artistic practices as well as the development of artistic skills. Moreover, these notions pave the way for studying tastes at a more micro-aesthetical or micro-sensitive level than the level of genres.

The thesis also contributes to the field of cultural sociology by updating or expanding upon Peterson's writings—which are not usually included in the new cultural sociology bracket—with newer reports on tastes. Here this is achieved by combining Peterson's thoughts with the



writings of Hennion and the empirical explorations conducted in the four articles. However, in this connection, I underline that we are still a long way from answering the question of *are (all) musicians are becoming omnivorous?* There is also so much more to scrutinize with regard to the symbolic boundaries regulating or forming pluralities of musical practices, not only with regards to “who performs what,” but also to how omnivorous practices are negotiated and nurtured into being in today’s complex (musical) society.

### **3.3 Contribution to, and implications for, the field of musicology**

This thesis contributes to musicology and the field’s so-called *performative turn* (see, e.g., Cook, 2014a, 2014b) by incorporating stories of performance practices into musical theatre history writing. This is achieved by emphasizing that songs—as well as musical styles and genres—are inextricably tied to the voices that produces them and to the reception of sounds and vibrations as they are being heard (Symonds, 2014). However, the thesis also contributes by exemplifying how the person and voice creating and being heard are “a manifestation of shared vocal practice[s]” (Eidsheim, 2019, p. 11).

The thesis also builds and expands upon renowned musicologist Cook’s writings in denoting and conceptualizing the term *vocal script*, offering ideas that will hopefully foster further analysis for understanding and exploring various performance practices and musical (theatre) works. With regards to this, Article 2 has allowed me to join the research project *Original Cast Recordings: Musical Theatre and/as Sonic Heritage*, initiated by the University of Portsmouth School of Art, Design and Performance. Here, my work is connected to exploring the cultural history, value and meaning of the original cast recording, thereby endeavoring to incorporate contemporary vocal performance practices into such research as well.

### **3.4 Contribution to, and implications for, the field of voice studies**

Last but not least, this thesis has contributed to the field of voice studies by putting forward situations of vocal practices in combination with philosophical and theoretical contemplations. The thesis is, therefore, no mere study only of the physical voice, only of the mind understanding such a voice, only of its performance practices, or only of the art object performed by a

voice. Rather, it is a thesis striving to break down dichotomies regarding voice and the art of making vocal music and vocal musical works, and it considers voice to be a process that is always unfolding, or in other words, of being and becoming. Here, the sound of a voice and its vocal practices is to be considered as a thick aesthetic event—neither entirely social nor fully material. In this regard, the thesis can be considered a work that operationalizes and examines voice studies scholar Eidsheim's (2019) well-renowned argument that voice is not singular—it is collective; voice is not innate—it is cultural; and the voice's source is not the singer—it is the listener (pp. 9, 10).

This thesis has also contributed to the field of voice studies by highlighting the role of taste in vocal processes, and by linking such investigations directly to the practice of teaching and learning voice. I therefore argue that the terms *the omnivorous voice* and *vocal omnivorousness* are fruitful concepts to be implemented within future voice studies—as well as within voice studios—to serve as analytical metaphors and framework for both creative and critical vocal thinkings as well as doings—a statement and hypothesis that this thesis is an ongoing experiment and exploration of.

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## Articles

- Article 1: Voicing omnivorousness, assembling the omnivorous voice: The American musical explored.
- Article 2: Exploring original cast recordings as “vocal scripts”: Navigating “vocal omnivorousness” and learning “the songs” of musical theatre.
- Article 3: We are also music lovers: Testing vocal tastes in higher musical theater education.
- Article 4: Musical theatre’s omnivorous voice: Interviews with elite voice teachers in the Broadway community



## Article 1

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# Voicing Omnivorousness, Assembling the Omnivorous Voice: The American Musical Explored

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the notion of cultural omnivorousness, as coined by Richard Peterson, to explore its various manifestations within the American musical, commonly known as the Broadway musical. Through two interconnected research questions, we explore how patterns of cultural omnivorousness are manifested within the American musical, contemporarily and in a historical perspective, and scrutinize what these omnivorous features demand from performers, more specifically, what it takes to perform what we name the omnivorous voice. Using the American musical as a site for exploration, the article aims to show that the omnivorousness is not only enjoyed by its audiences, but produced, brought about and enjoyed by its composers, producers and performers alike. Consequently, the article's main argument is that the phenomenon of cultural omnivorousness not only concerns cultural consumption but is to be regarded as a matter of cultural production as well, manifested ultimately as specific artistic and embodied practices. The article conveys a theoretically informed discussion, drawing on works written within the fields of cultural sociology, musicology and voice studies, while incorporating illustrative references to specific recorded musical works and the vocal behaviours of named performers.

## Keywords

American musical, Broadway musical, cultural consumption, cultural omnivorousness, cultural production, the omnivorous voice

## Introduction

The concept and phenomenon of *cultural omnivorousness* has been hot on the cultural sociology agenda ever since Peterson and his collaborators introduced it in the early

1990s (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992). Over time, it has been explored from different angles and within various cultural formats and contexts, proving to lend itself well to exploring the changing dynamics of post- or late-modern cultural life. Such explorations have contributed to fine-tuning, but also troubling, our understanding of the culturally broad-consuming figure of *the cultural omnivore* and how omnivorization might manifest differently across time, space and place in the field of cultural consumption.

In this article, we focus on the notion of cultural omnivorousness to explore its various manifestations within the American musical, more commonly known as the Broadway musical. We aim to show, through our exploration, that the American musical can be understood as a rapidly changing form of musical theatre, one which includes a wide range of musical genres in its repertoire and is prone to absorb and draw upon whatever musical style is needed to suit its purpose (Green et al., 2014; Hoch, 2018; Kayes, 2015; Melton, 2007). Moreover, we argue that the demands that the contemporary American musical places on its performers bring about a turn from univorous to omnivorous practitioners, ultimately manifested all the way down to the level of the vocal folds, through the performers inhabiting, assembling and performing what we have chosen to name *the omnivorous voice*. In this article, our choice to focus on voice and vocal behaviour and not on other parts of performance, is motivated by the point that the voice is the musical's 'single principal instrument' (Symonds, 2018: 151) and is considered 'the currency by which musicals exchange value' (Jake Johnson, personal correspondence, 24 June 2020). We do, however, throughout, name our practitioners *performers*, as we argue that musical theatre performers today are commonly considered 'triple threats' – mastering the art of acting, singing and dancing – and will seldom refer to themselves as purely singers.

We align our work with previous research on cultural omnivorousness (for a brief overview, please see later in this article) in that music is used as the prime cultural content through which the phenomenon of omnivorousness is understood and measured. However, we depart from previous understandings by expanding the concept not only to encompass modes and patterns of cultural consumption but to include the field of cultural production. Thereby recognizing that the broad, hybrid and fragmented omnivorous musical taste patterns that the American musical elicits are not only enjoyed by its audiences, but also produced, brought about, and enjoyed by its composers, producers and performers alike. Drawing on the original meaning of the suffixes of -vorous and -vore – commonly understood as the act of or the creature engaged in feeding on a broad variety of foods – we argue that the American musical's composers, producers and performers, through their aesthetic choices, can be seen as feeding voraciously on a wide range of musics in order to bring this genre into life. Thereby, they create a broad variety of musical works that the 'original' omnivores – the audience – can consume. Consequently, the research questions we ask in this article are the following:

- How is cultural omnivorousness manifested in the American musical with respect to patterns of cultural consumption as well as production – contemporarily and in a historical perspective?

- What do the omnivorous features of the American musical demand from its performers, or, in other words, what does it take to perform the omnivorous voice?

Setting out to identify possible answers to our questions, we draw on works written within the fields of cultural sociology (e.g. Bennett et al., 1999; Ollivier, 2008; Warde et al., 2007), musicology (e.g. Block, 2002, 2009; Knapp et al., 2018a, 2018b; Taylor, 2012) and voice studies (e.g. Eidsheim, 2019, LoVetri et al., 2014; Macpherson, 2019). We see our work as a theoretically informed discussion, combining a historical perspective on musical theatre with contemporary issues of embodiment and performance. However, as the written history of musical theatre is highly the history of composers and written works, and not one of performance practices, we will throughout the article refer to specific recordings and performers to strengthen our argumentation and illustrate our points. We recognize that approaching omnivorousness in this way departs from Peterson's empiricist works to a great extent. Still, given that little attention has been shown towards whether, or how, the phenomenon of cultural omnivorousness can be found within practices of cultural production, we believe that this article's main contribution lies in exploring an overarching thought of 'what if cultural producers become omnivorous as well?'<sup>1</sup> Peterson (1997) himself addressed the need for this type of research:

Even if plurality is considered post modernistic bricolage, the question still remains, which bricks are selected together by some groups of people and which are rejected only to be picked up and formed into other meaningful structures? Thus, as I see it, the exciting research challenge now is to learn how this vast plurality of popular music is sorted and recombined by artists, by the people in the industry. (1997: 55)

More recently, Hazir and Warde (2016) have argued that cultural sociology would benefit from deciphering 'the ways in which omnivorous repertoires are formed, transmitted and experienced' (2016: 86) in the interrelationship between conditions of cultural production, institutionalized repertoires and individual tastes. Similarly, Wright (2011) argues that 'debates about the social patterns of taste need to take greater account of changed practices of cultural production [. . .] of the ways culture is produced, circulated and valued' (2011: 355). It is within this area that our research takes place, exploring the omnivorous traits of the American musical, all the way down to the miniscule muscles involved in regulating the vocal apparatus and assembling vocal behaviours.

## **Cultural Omnivorousness: The New (Musical) Sign of Cultural Capital**

Cultural omnivorousness and the notion of the cultural omnivore as coined by Peterson (1992; see also Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992) are built on the empirical observation that 'high status Americans [are] far more likely than others to consume the fine arts [and] to be involved in a wide range of low-status activities' (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 900). In this understanding, cultural omnivorousness denotes a development of taste processes, where, over time, cultural consumers in western

countries were found to have an increased breadth of cultural taste and a willingness to cross established hierarchical genre boundaries when consuming art and cultural activities.<sup>2</sup> Building on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of symbolic and cultural capital, but challenging 'the Bourdieuan assumption of the strict homology between social class and consumption' (Santoro, 2008: 50), the omnivore figure suggests a 'qualitative shift in the basis for marking elite status' (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 900), defining 'a cultural consumer characterized by conspicuous diversity rather than refinement and exclusion' (Rossman and Peterson, 2015: 139).

The notion of the omnivore has inspired a number of studies worldwide, spanning much of Europe, Australia and North America (Bennett et al., 1999; Bennett et al., 2009; Cutts and Widdop, 2017; Ollivier, 2008; van Eijck, 2001; Warde et al., 2007; see also Peterson, 2005 for an extended overview). Commonly, when studies of cultural omnivorousness are conducted, music is used as a case, implying that higher-status groups in society have expanded their tastes into a broader segment of music than lower-status groups, the latter contrastingly seen as more univore in their consumption patterns. The more genres one likes, the more omnivorous one supposedly is, but the diversity is also connected to mobility between key sociological categorical types, such as high, middle, and lowbrow (Savage and Gayo, 2011). Peterson (1992) explains the choice of music as a case, claiming that, 'unlike questions about activities attended, time or money spent, all respondents are equally able to respond [to explain their preferences for music] no matter where they live or whatever other demands there are on their resources' (1992: 247). Additionally, the use of music as an indicator of aesthetic tastes indicates a conception of musical genres as easily classified into hierarchical taste categories (Peterson and Kern, 1996). Thereby, with music, one can measure genres liked as an indicator of breadth in tastes and gain an understanding of taste hierarchies (Rossman and Peterson, 2015). This carries the assumption, confirmed by Bennett et al. (2009), that music constitutes an important site for cultural negotiation, being 'the most divided, contentious, cultural field of any [examined . . .] central to [the] concern with probing contemporary cultural dynamics and tensions' (2009: 75).

In this article, we operationalize the omnivore as a figure consuming, gorging, on a wide variety of musical genres, with a willingness to cross genre borders within and across high and low categorizations of musics, arguing that their broad taste patterns symbolize and attract high status in the omnivore's social world. Nonetheless, as previously stated, we do depart from Peterson in not fixing the omnivore to the role of the cultural consumer. Operationalizing omnivorousness in the form of the volume, composition and orientation of musics liked, utilizes musics in their objectified form, manifested most often as predefined genre categories. Musical genre categories typically define types or kinds of music grouped together with other similar kinds of musics, based on kindred cultural traditions and conventions. Noteworthy, however, these kinds of musics are commonly categorized by more than their common musical features, as such groupings often 'hinge on elements of nationality, class, race, gender or sexuality' (Brackett, 2016: 4) as well. Genres are thereby considered a way for the music industry to organize itself, for radios to decide what to play, for musicians to promote themselves, for venues creating booking profiles, for audiences seeking musics to enjoy and people to enjoy them with (Silver et al., 2016), and for researchers organizing their research.

With respect to previous omnivorousness research, the Broadway musical is mostly classified as a specific *musical* genre juxtaposing, for example, rock, bluegrass, or classical and further defined as a middlebrow form of musical output (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Savage and Gayo, 2011). This article, however, shows the American musical as a genre within the larger art form of *musical theatre* – defined by its combination of song, music, acting, visual spectacle, and most often dancing – and in which many genres within the larger art form of *music*, such as rock, folk, hip hop and jazz are in play. In this regard, we are aware that, for instance, when an American musical is labelled a ‘rock musical’, it might more correctly be seen as written ‘in the style of rock’, as it usually only absorbs certain elements of the musical genre, enough to make it recognizable as rock, but without including all elements that the genre might obtain, such as its performers, fans, way of life, or presentational mode. In this article, we therefore implement the term *musical style* to describe a somewhat coherent set of musical performance practices within a genre, acknowledging that a specific musical genre might consist of a variety of (sub-) styles, such as West-Coast rap or New Orleans jazz. We also implement the term *musical idiom* to denote specific musical traits within a style, such as elements of phrasing, dynamics, or excess sound effects (Fisher et al., 2019). When it comes to *vocal idioms*, these elements are mainly not notated in the written score but are elements learned and transmitted through sonic information (Taylor, 2012), in the American musical typically made accessible by a show’s (original) cast recording (von Germeten, 2021).

We also acknowledge that utilizing predetermined genre categorizations in our research follows a trajectory that somewhat problematically relies on assumptions about the rigidity and stability of a musical genre over time. Such classification acts may ignore specific genres or exclude subdivisions or styles within predefined categories. Musical genres are complex and fluid (Savage and Gayo, 2011), and their boundaries, consumption patterns, and performance practices are constantly negotiated. Thus, we acknowledge that musical genres continually emerge and evolve, sometimes even disappear (Vlegels and Lievens, 2017), and that both a genre’s labelling and its contents are constantly a matter of discussion and negotiation.

## **The Contemporary American Musical: Patterns of Omnivorous Consumption**

The American musical and its geographical focal point – Broadway, New York City – is often considered unapologetically commercial<sup>3</sup> with an audience described as urban, middle- and upper-class, and white (Decker, 2018), well-off, well-educated and predominantly female (Dvoskin, 2018), having considerably more economical and educational capital than most Americans (Savran, 2018). In the omnivorousness literature, it is argued that such a high-status audience’s willingness to consume a broad repertoire of genres, is often justified as a desire to learn new things, to stimulate one’s mind, or as the ability to confidently conduct aesthetic interpretation and judgment across genres (see Ollivier, 2008). In other words, such omnivorous consumption is seen as a form of ‘enlightened eclecticism’<sup>4</sup> (Regev, 2013: 15). Regev’s concept captures a mode of consumption also described by Peterson and Kern (1996), in which omnivores do not necessarily see themselves as hardcore fans liking everything indiscriminately. Rather, they



may ‘appreciate and critique it [the cultural content] in the light of some knowledge of the genre, its great performers, and links to other cultural forms’ (1996: 904).

Ollivier (2008) argues that within this type of omnivorousness, a ‘proper’ distance to the artwork in question is upheld, sometimes combined with an ironic attitude allowing for an emotional distance between the consumer and the object. Notably, the Broadway musical is frequently seen to inhabit such ironic distance within itself. To value musical theatre on its own terms is to accept a ‘too muchness’ (Johnson et al., 2019: 47), a genre that is exaggerative, campy, self-reflexive, ‘pastiche’, overly emotional, with people bursting out into song and dance at the slightest provocation. Arguably, we consider the musical as more multi-layered than this. However, such a well-established mental picture may offer the distance needed to allow oneself to appreciate the genre and its diverse musical styles as a ‘guilty pleasure’ without losing face or status.

Savran (2004) claims that ‘no theatre form is as single-mindedly devoted to producing pleasure, inspiring spectators to tap their feet, sing along, or otherwise be carried away’ (2004: 215), and according to Wolff (2018), we watch musicals for much the same reasons as we watch the Olympics: to fulfil a human desire to test limits, expressions and talents of the human body; ‘the stakes are high and live bodies can’t fake the necessary effort’ (Wolff, 2018: 13). Which sport, or in this case, which musical, we end up seeing, however, may in this context not be of primary importance, leading to a reappearing curation of a wide variety of shows that are considered to have been imbued with ‘cultural capital and become “the thing to see” whether the show itself seems particularly interesting to a given spectator’ (Dvoskin, 2018: 135). A person exhibiting this way of consuming culture is described by Warde et al. (2007) as the unassuming omnivore, one who chooses recent best-selling books, popular television programs, or established rock or pop artists, demonstrating little sense of adventure or critical sense, liking a bit of everything (see also Ollivier, 2008). The strong tradition of *the revival* in Broadway theatre, offering an already successful back catalogue of Broadway classics to new generations and audiences, may be seen as one result of this.

## **Omnivorousness as the Trick of Production: The Art of Musical Citing**

When shows live or die by their ticket sales (Dvoskin, 2018), a matrix of commercial necessity may also turn into a constant search for ‘the next new’ (Morris, 2018). Hence, musical theatre producers and investors might act as gentrifying or appropriating agents of various popular music genres and styles, searching for the next big hit, leading to an increased number of jukebox and bio-musicals with already built-in audiences, or to an absorbance of contemporary, already financially successful, popular musical genres, resulting in so-called ‘pop-musicals’ or ‘folk-musicals’. This might create a safe space for omnivorous audiences tasting and consuming musical styles and genres they otherwise would not consult, as long as other elements of the musical are intact, for example, the combination of singing, dancing and acting. This is in line with what Bennett et al. (2009) name short-range omnivorousness, a mode which involves consuming ‘cognate musical forms’ (2009: 77). Noteworthy, however, is that an incorporated genre or style might change or adapt in this absorption process. It might be made more exclusive,

maybe even unaffordable to their original possessors, or changed, weakened, or broken in their 'primary nature'. Consequently, the history of the American musical carries a trajectory of critique when it comes to cultural appropriation, representation, and the borders between being influenced, sampling and stealing. In its early days, this was mainly linked to the act of blackface minstrelsy or other stereotyping of ethnic groups, including 'pigtail-wearing, bucktoothed Asians; whiskey-guzzling, belligerent Irishmen; wurst-gobbling, beer-swilling Germans' (Wollman, 2017: 15). In recent days, musicals such as Disney's *Moana* (Miranda et al., 2016) have faced accusations of musical ethnocentrism, wrapping Polynesian musical traits within western idioms and formats, thereby illustrating 'a musical recapitulation of white men's control and marketing of the representations of marginalized people' (Armstrong, 2018: 112).

Despite the American musical's all-encompassing demand for market success, a Broadway show is equally measured by how it is received by peers, expressed through industry awards and favourable reviews (Thomas, 2019). Hence, prevalent artistic values such as innovation, creativity, authenticity, and freedom of cultural expression may also lead composers and producers to include a variety of genres and styles, in which artists 'from below' expand the frames of the American musical in an almost activist way, opening up a path for genres that historically have been marginalized. The story of Lin-Manuel Miranda and the musical *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015) serves as an example of this, bringing rap and hip-hop culture to Broadway with triumph across all success parameters (Shishko, 2019). In *Hamilton*, Miranda uses, as is commonly practiced by most musical theatre composers, music as a form of subtext, expressing notions of the play's geographical centre, qualities of a specific character, or the overall scene-specific dramatic narrative, 'evoking an appropriate "atmosphere" by adopting specific styles of song, and of singing' (Morris and Knapp, 2018: 250). Implementing a specific idiom, such as a melody that sounds foreign, for example, a pentatonic one, may raise the mental picture of 'the Oriental'; utilizing a complex cross-rhythm may evoke the idea of Latin America (Decker, 2018). In *Hamilton*, Miranda, with his background in slam poetry, uses rap to capture the overall 'essence' of the show – the rebellious spirit of the American founding fathers – the same way Pasek and Paul in *Dear Evan Hansen* (Pasek and Paul, 2017) tell the story of a boy struggling in the age of social media through pop music very similar to what is heard on the radio today. Musically styling a show's narrative with cultural codes additionally enables different styles to be at play within the same musical 'without needing to answer to the standards of unity that opera and other "serious" musical genres seem to demand' (Morris and Knapp, 2018: 252). Citing and using music as subtext in this eclectic manner, links the musical to contemporary postmodern values, where acts such as borrowing, even plagiarism, may become part of the process of making and consuming art and where art is viewed as a 'pool of permanently usable resources' (Bauman, 1988: 792).

Nevertheless, for music to work as subtext, composers and producers within the American musical rely on relatively stable, immediately accessible and recognizable audible categorizations of musical genres and styles to make its citations work. This may, as previously described, foster the idea that there is such a thing as an underlying unity, a stable meaning, linked to musical genres, styles, or how people sound. For example, when all four plays nominated for 'Best Musical' in 2010 were written in the style of

rock, *New York Times* critic Jon Pareles (2010) wrote: ‘Broadway may be the final place in America, if not the known universe, where rock still registers as rebellious’. The Broadway musical thereby constitutes associations to genres that become ‘increasingly potent as cultural habits become ingrained, and as popular music uses stereotypical signifiers to short-cut meanings’ (Taylor and Symonds, 2014: 32). Further, these ‘broad brushes of Broadway’ might additionally make the single body of the performer ‘bear the burden of representation, signifying more than simply an individual, standing in for the very idea or whole category of [. . .] people’ (Wolf, 2018: 37).

In addition to citing and refracting<sup>5</sup> a multitude of musical genres and styles, the American musical also engulfs and transforms other cultural expressions, resulting in sub-genres such as the cabaret, the film musical, the television series musical, cast recordings, and the animated musical, as well as the tendency to base its content on many sources, including literature, screen (film or TV), plays, real people or events, other musicals and operas (Hodge, 2020). These additions are also part of what enables, justifies and assembles what we name *the omnivorous voice*, which we will turn to next, arguing that the omnivorous features, and hence, the vocal demands placed on the performers in contemporary American musical theatre not only voice omnivorousness at the level of the genre, but require that the performer assembles and performs an omnivorous voice.

## A Brief History of Voice in the American Musical

To explore and conceptualize our notion of the omnivorous voice, we begin by paying attention to the American musical’s history and its changing aesthetic values. Though musical theatre history studies reveal no single linear development of relationships that tell the whole (hi)story of the genre (Taylor and Symonds, 2014), it is arguable that an eclectic aptitude has existed, not only within contemporary times but since its beginnings in the early 20th century. Stemming from a mix of influences, such as Tin Pan Alley, burlesque, extravaganza, minstrelsy and vaudeville – all historically considered commercial, lowbrow art forms – it merged with more well-regarded middlebrow classifications, such as the European operetta – exemplified by the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, such as *HMS Pinafore* (Sullivan, 2006) – to become what we recognize as the American musical today (Hodge, 2020; Knapp et al., 2018a). A significant work from this era can be defined as Kern and Hammerstein’s *Show Boat* from 1927. *Show Boat* is often described as a ‘light opera’ (Block, 2009: 20) or the ‘greatest of all American Operettas’ (2009: 21), written in an almost ‘Wagnerian fashion’ (2009: 28), by many recognized as constituting the first American Musical (Wollman, 2017). Even though Kern’s score cites and thus offers a ‘jazzy feeling’, drawing additionally on blues and spirituals,<sup>6</sup> the performed vocal parts lean heavily on western lyrical, classical idioms, such as extended use of so-called head voice by all female singers singing above the note of A4 (American Standard Pitch Notation), and a frequent use of vibrato, modified vowels and portamenti. This way of singing is, and was, often named as singing in a *legit* voice (see e.g. Kayes, 2015), by many then considered ‘the only singing acceptable in civilized and proper society’ (Edwin, 2007: 213). Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (Gershwin, 2009) from 1934 is another significant show favouring pentatonic melodies, jazz progressions and blue

notes (Block, 2002, 2009), however, with vocals performed in a nearly operatic manner. Thus, it can be argued that the omnivorousness present in these early days of the American musical was executed by composers citing and mixing musical genres and styles rather than performed as vocal behaviours. Noteworthy is also that the performers in this era were considered specialists, embodying particular types of roles, rotating between leads and character parts, depending on the show's style (Dvoskin, 2018). According to Clum (2018),

[t]he chorus was split into singers and dancers. Comics didn't have to be very good singers. Big-voiced singers weren't expected to be great actors [. . .] The baritone who sang the big ballads wasn't expected to have comic timing [. . .] Singers with legitimate voices weren't expected to belt [. . .] Acting was definitely secondary to quasi-operatic singing (2018: 226).

Moving towards the middle of the 20th century, composers, librettists and producers continued to create works aiming to pull towards what was considered more intellectual, 'morally dignified' art forms, such as opera and legitimate theatre, emulating these 'highbrow forms while making them more accessible' (Savran, 2018: 82). The goal was an *integrated* musical, moving seamlessly from spoken word to song to dance as if the same person created all elements (Taylor, 2012). In the still-standing narrative of a 'Golden Age' within the Broadway musical, extending from about 1940 until 1960 (Morris, 2018), characters became more realistically portrayed and psychologized like in non-musical works (Knapp et al., 2018a), changing the Broadway composers' status once and for all from mere tunesmiths, often writing not plot- or character-connected songs, to the idea of the composers as dramatists (Grossman, 2018). A full orchestral sound was additionally implemented attempting to '[assist] the ideological claim to high-art status that the musical has always encouraged' in the belief that '[i]f musicals use classical or "legit" frameworks and terminology, they become increasingly valued artistically and culturally' (Symonds, 2018: 158). Bernstein's *Candide* from 1956 (Bernstein, 2018) or Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* from 1945 (Rodgers, 2009), are considered significant works in this regard.

As elements of jazz, blues and spirituals were present on the Broadway stage during this period, to some degree, was also the *belting* voice.<sup>7</sup> However, the dominant vocal expression was still melodies composed for classically trained voices, though with tessituras generally lower and more limited than for the operatic repertoire, to enable lyrics to come through (Taylor, 2012). The classical voice was also the only singing offered within singing tuition. The belted voice, on the other hand, was mostly defined as a 'natural' voice (Taylor, 2012); the often-told anecdote of Gershwin ordering belting star Ethel Merman to 'never go near a voice teacher' (Bryan, 1992: 5) arguably exemplifies this. Additionally, a belting voice was often described using negative terms such as 'unsupported' or 'unprojected' singing (Salzman and Desi, 2008), or as singing lacking sophistication (Taylor, 2012).

However, moving further into the second half of the 1900s, an array of musical genres entered the American musical theatre stage. In the late 1960s, the first 'rock musical', *Hair* (MacDermot, 2003), made it to Broadway. And in the late 1970s, rhythm and blues, gospel and soul started to fill the scores (Laird, 2018) with shows such as

*Dreamgirls* (Krieger, 2006). Until now, male performers had sung in more chest-like vocal qualities to ‘perform masculinity’; their romantic counterparts were typically cast as ‘soaring sopranos’. This drastically changed with the entrance of rock, as heard in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Lloyd Webber, 2021), where both Judas and Jesus let their ‘falsettos’ shine, while the female lead, Maria Magdalena, is written in a lower range, featuring chest and speech-like sounds, not showcasing her head voice at all (Macpherson, 2019; Taylor, 2012). The 1980s followed with pop-influenced works, larger casts, spectacular sets, and eye-catching costumes (Wollman, 2017). These shows were often composed-through and written featuring big vocal parts, as heard in *Les Misérables* (Schönberg, 1987).<sup>8</sup> The 1990s came with mega-musicals such as *The Lion King* (John, 1997), and jukebox musicals built on established popular music acts, for example ABBA’s *Mamma Mia* (Andersson and Ulvaeus, 1999). Turning to the post-millennium, a wide variety of musical genres were all transformed from states of antagonist to novelty to mainstay in the musical theatre’s repertoire: country, as heard in *9 To 5 – The Musical* (Parton, 2009), soul, as in *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical* (King, 2014), rap, as made impactful in *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015), folk, as flourishing in *Hadestown* (Mitchell, 2019) and world music, as heard in *The Band’s Visit* (Yazbek, 2017). Thereby, a wide variety of vocal sounds and idioms entered Broadway, from quirky vocal breaks, via rough vocal effects, to a varied use of ornamentations and ad-libs; vocal behaviours made possible to incorporate onto the large stages due to the entrance of advanced technological equipment and the use of head microphones in the musical theatre scene (Macpherson, 2019; Taylor, 2012).

Significant in regard and to our argumentation is that the vocal expectations of the single performer changed during these decades, coinciding with the increased breadth and variety of works and musical styles included. Today, musical re-skilling – a broadening of one’s artistic practice – is described as crucial to obtain sustainability, employability and success within the musical theatre profession (Green et al., 2014; Hoch, 2018; Kayes, 2015). As expressed by LoVetri et al. (2014): ‘Everybody needs to sing everything’ (2014: 65). Voice in the American musical is thereby seen as inhabiting a so-called vicarious state, where performers express something on behalf of another, using sounds that do not exclusively ‘belong’ to the performers themselves, at the same time, the performers constitute this ‘other’ by giving them voice (Johnson, 2019). In a vicarious state, vocal behaviour always changes according to the vocal demands embarked upon in a piece or a part, and performers are expected to sing a show in one style at night, rehearsing a completely different show during the day, maybe auditioning for a third – all within different musical styles and idioms (Melton, 2007). In other words, the performer needs to master an omnivorous voice gorging on a wide variety of vocal aesthetics. The privilege of singing a specific *fach*<sup>9</sup> is no longer an option (LoVetri, 2007; Saunders-Barton, 2007), and according to Melton (2007), virtually any sound that is safely produced may be useful, including shouts and screams, blurring the line between song and speech. LeBorgne (2007) argues that:

today’s musical theatre composers are starting to push the vocal boundaries of what the human voice is capable of. Inevitably, there is a singer out there who can do what composers are writing and then they write bigger and better songs. I think we are getting into an age of vocal acrobatics. (2007: 13)

According to Wilson (2007):

[i]t is classical, it is gospel, it is rock and roll, it is pop, it is Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk, it's rap. It is world music, it is jazz [. . .] Every range of music is catered for in Musical Theatre, so you cannot be a snob. You cannot say 'Oh, I want to do Musical Theatre but I only want to work in a legit voice'. Well, you can, but you're not going to make money for your agent and you're not going to make money for you, QED you're not going to be in the business, and show business is called a business. (2007: 156)

Even though an increasing range of popular musics are seen as the current norm of the present-day musical theatre profession, as Wilson highlights, the legit voice is still highly present, possibly due to the strong position of Sondheim's renowned works such as *Sweeney Todd* (Sondheim, 1979). But also new musicals such as *The Light in the Piazza* (Guettel, 2005) or *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Lutvak and Freedman, 2014) keep the classical vocal idioms alive, making the omnivorous voice even broader in its aesthetical absorption and practices.

## Performing the Omnivorous Voice

All humans, when not in disease or having physical irregularities, possess the same anatomical parts; however, the utilization of these, the physiology of the voice, is a matter of practices (Edgerton, 2014). Performers are able to manipulate the different parts of their vocal apparatus, their vocal fold vibrational patterns, their subglottal air pressure, and their vocal tract configuration to create diverse and desired vocal outcomes. Ultimately, all singing training is built on assisting such alterations. Even though performers work hard to make their singing styles and vocal techniques appear natural, they 'are culturally based articulations, are neither "natural" nor unchanging, they alter over time to new technologies, new compositions, and changing tastes [. . .] existing within a geographical, linguistic and historical context' (Taylor and Symonds, 2014: 38). According to Johnson et al. (2019), singing is 'a citational practice' (2019: 35); we always cite our teachers from whom we have learned the song. It is arguable, nonetheless, that this citing starts long before taking voice lessons. For example, our voices are the citation of our mother tongue's melody line, the voices of our parents, the sound of the songs we have heard, the vocal traditions we are raised within, and the vowels of our spoken language. Symonds (2014) underlines that 'the sung' is not created in one body; the individual voice becomes layered, creating a new texture by the many voices outside. Such an encultured conception of the voice does not argue that the varying sizes and dimensions of the singers' cavities and anatomical structures – for example the thickness and length of one's vocal folds – do not play a role in shaping, enabling and limiting the individual voice. However, these biomechanical aspects do not alone constitute the vocal output, or a singer's perceived 'voiceprint' (Hall, 2006).

The American musical theatre star Jessie Mueller may serve as a vivid example of someone embodying and mastering our conception of the omnivorous voice. Mueller possesses an impressive resumé of being nominated four times at the Tony Awards in the category 'Best Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical'. In 2012 she was nominated for the revival of *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*,<sup>10</sup> capturing the part of Melinda

Wells – ‘no longer a love-crossed English beauty from the 18th century but a feisty big-band singer from the early 1940s’ (Brantley, 2011) – featuring vocal idioms such as a brassy ‘Broadway belt’, great volumes and excessive vocal effects, vocal behaviours commonly found in swing-era songs. In 2014 she was nominated and won for her role as pop-soul singer and composer Carole King in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* (King, 2014), evoking ‘Ms. King’s distinctively throaty, ever-yearning voice without mimicry’ (Brantley, 2014). In 2016, Mueller performed the part of Jenna Hunterson in *Waitress* (Bareilles, 2016), which draws ‘on the sounds of country music reflecting the Southern setting, but also containing more traditional Broadway-pop balladry’ (Isherwood, 2016). Here Mueller used softer, more ‘polished’ belted sounds, soft and airy speech-like voice qualities, and small, audible, quirky vocal breaks. Her third Tony Award came with the 2018 Broadway revival of *Carousel* (Rodgers, 2018), starring as Julie Jordan beside world-renowned opera singer Renée Fleming,<sup>11</sup> showcasing a seemingly legit or classically trained voice, with long lines, evenness across registers, combining ‘strength and serenity, quiet joy and accepting sadness, qualities that flow through her liquid soprano’ (Brantley, 2018). Adding Mueller’s country performance of Loretta Lynn in the biographical drama television film *Patsy and Loretta* (Khouri, 2019) to this short resumé, her case should serve well as an exemplification of an American musical omnivorous practitioner. Even though Mueller is to be seen as an elite performer, we argue that today’s expectation of mastering an omnivorous voice applies to ‘all’ musical theatre performers – also ensemble members, understudies and swings – as manifested in musical theatre education curricula worldwide, as well as in the single performer’s audition book, containing commonly 8–10 songs spanning across history and musical styles, composed as a variety of ballads, up-tempo, dramatic and ‘comic relief’ songs (Moore, 2017).

Seen from a vocal technical stand, we argue that the omnivorous voice is a fruitful term and conceptualization within voice studies and voice studios as well as within cultural sociological contexts. We argue that the term expresses the volume and intensity of vocal aesthetics involved when performing musical theatre and offers an understanding of vocal practice as physiological behaviour constantly in dialogue with plural (and changing) aesthetic valuations, traditions and tastes. The term also implies a voice view where vocal technique is divisible into bricks and pieces, combinable to your (or others’) aesthetic likings and preferences. In other words, we argue, borrowing the phrasings of Eidsheim (2019), that the omnivorous voice highlights that ‘voice is not singular, it is collective. Voice is not innate, it is cultural’ (2019: 9). Arguably, the example of Mueller illustrates this way of theorizing voice in an excellent manner. Even from the perspective of a trained musical-vocal ear, we argue, it is impossible to judge which of Mueller’s voices are to be defined as ‘true’, ‘authentic’, or with ‘which she was born’, concluding that how we sound or sing is not a predetermined matter, but a result of having a broad pattern of possible sounds available, or unavailable, to our vocal becoming. Consequently, both formal and informal voice training may bring out, or dampen, certain parts of our voices’ almost infinite aesthetic potentialities. Building a well-equipped, broad technical and aesthetic toolbox, in other words, *cross-training* the voice (Greschner, 2019), may foster creativity and expand artistic expression, and thus strengthen a singer’s uniqueness and perceived artistic quality, and hence the status, in form of the skill to express,

perform and, importantly, to *change* between broad, diverse, subtle and complex musical meanings, styles and idioms. However, the notion of the omnivorous voice might consequently exchange a commonly expressed quest for *authenticity* within the American musical (LoVetri et al., 2014) into a quest for *believability*. Thus, what it ultimately takes to perform the omnivorous voice in a professional, high-status kind of way is to be able to take in, gorge on – and combine – knowledge, understanding and mastery of a broad variety of musical codes, and amalgamate these elements into vocal behaviours in a believable manner.

## Concluding Remarks and Implications for Future Research

We have aimed to show throughout this article that the omnivorousness prevalent in the American musical consists of broad, hybrid and fragmented musical consumption patterns in the form of included – *gorged on* – musical genres, styles, appropriations, citations and performance practices. Further, we argue that the various omnivorous features of the American musical have a bearing on the vocal demands that the field affords, on applied sound qualities, and on the vocal techniques used to develop these, all the way down to the mini muscles regulating our vocal apparatus. Omnivorousness thereby becomes a term not only conceptualizing consumers' actions, but the doings of producers, composers and performers alike. The adjective *broad*, in this regard, implies liking, absorbing, feeding on, and performing a high volume of various idioms, styles and genres, combined with a willingness to cross historical taste classifications. The *hybrid* side of omnivorousness acknowledges the fluid, changing nature of musical styles, as omnivorous consumption, production and performance patterns may lead to refraction, appropriation and gentrification, not only of musical genres, but also of elements from other art fields, altogether constituting new, hybrid musical art forms and expressions. The *fragmented* side of omnivorousness allows for only *certain* elements – bricks and pieces of the appreciated or absorbed – to be consumed. These are not to be seen as loose elements floating independently or arbitrarily around, but as pieces entangled and assembled through meaning-making acts of citing and sampling. Thus, utilizing the American musical as a case for exploration makes it possible to see how omnivorousness may blur the symbolic boundaries of musical genres, styles and contents. Paradoxically, our exploration also makes visible how omnivorousness potentially congeals and illuminates genres and genre borders, whose significance and meaning may vary across contexts. Noteworthy in this regard is that the agile, conspicuously diverse, musically indiscriminate, multi-layered, highly commercialized, high-status, omnivorous American musical, despite its expressed pluralities, always ends up voicing itself in a singular manner – as *a Musical*.

Commenting on our conceptualization of the term *the omnivorous voice*, literally speaking, no one can be omnivorous in its total sense, feasting on and performing every musical style available or at the same time. However, with regards to the American musical, at this point in our train of thoughts, there seems to be no, or few, limitations to the potential extent and volume of omnivorousness attached, especially when it comes to the performers. The moment something new appears, either validated by the market, peers, or expert success, it seems to render compulsory incorporation into the expectations of



the body and vocal behaviour of the performer. However, as previous writings on the ‘original’ cultural omnivorousness underline (see e.g. Bennett et al., 2009), some musical borders might be more difficult to cross than others, resulting in both inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes. Thus, within the American musical, questions of what, and who, is being included and excluded from the business, and on what terms, are more present than ever, and arguably of interest for future research.

As we see it, moving the omnivorousness term and its theoretical framework from the field of consumption into the field of cultural production potentially opens up new avenues for empirical and theoretical research on cultural tastes, participations, appropriations and performances. Linked to our notion of the omnivorous voice, this could be articulated in questions relating to symbolic boundaries regulating, for example, who is allowed to sing, who is allowed to sing what, where, and for whom, and – not least – who is allowed to sing in any particular way. Further research may be conceptualized to scrutinize how performing the omnivorous voice is experienced or how it can be taught, bringing clarity to what characterizes omnivorous performers. It would also be interesting to explore if performing omnivorousness is a specific *vocal* trait within musical theatre or if it plays out similarly in other parts of musical theatre performances, for example within dance parts or amongst musicians in the pit orchestra, or how omnivorousness potentially plays out within other musical genres or other art forms. Not only with regard to ‘who likes and performs what’, but to how omnivorousness is negotiated, justified, or exhibited, for example, linked to ongoing discussions about employability, ideas of the ‘portfolio’ performer, or values such as artistic freedom. Here, writings on the nature of cultural valuation could be seen as fruitful to incorporate. One could, for example, move in the direction of Varriale (2015), theorizing cultural evaluation as a ‘social encounter between the dispositions of social actors [. . .] and the aural, visual and narrative properties of cultural objects’ (2015: 160), or towards Hennion (2015) regarding taste as a performative act that transforms, engages and is felt, and further involves skills and sensitizing. All things considered, moving the omnivorousness framework from consumption to production arguably also opens up the possibility for an overarching discussion about the *role of tastes* amongst performers in the process of making art; as we see it, a rather unexplored research field within cultural sociology.

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## Notes

1. A similar question is also asked by Luo (2019), in an article scrutinizing China's Rainbow Chamber singers.
2. Issues concerning 'how cultural omnivorousness is defined, measured and operationalized' (Cutts and Widdop, 2017: 480) are widely debated. Using the words of Peterson (2005), the concept has been under constant scrutiny, 'from its serendipitous discovery and its evolving conceptualization to questions about its passing' (2005: 258). For further readings regarding disagreements over parameters of inquiry, social implications, study constructions and methodologies, see for example Brisson (2019), Hazir and Warde (2016) and Robette and Roueff (2014).
3. According to Hodge (2020), in the season of 2018/19, Broadway grossed 14.77 million admissions, 78–89% of the grosses stem from musical theatre tickets, and numbers from the previous season (2017/18) showed that approximately 63% of these visitors were tourists, of which 48% were domestic and 15% were international.
4. Eclecticism is often presented as an alternative conceptualization of broad consumer patterns. However, the concept is also often rejected and criticized in terms of not capturing the importance of 'increased volume and intensity of cultural engagement' (Hazir and Warde, 2016: 77).
5. Within a Bourdieusian logic, refraction is recognized as the strong capacity for absorption and transformation, in other words 'the effect of translation' that the specific logic of a particular art field 'imposes on external influences or commissions' (Bourdieu, 1996: 220). In our understanding, the huge uptake and recasting of musical genres and art forms that the American musical showcases may be viewed as such a capacity.
6. The earliest recorded digital version of this show found, is from the 1946 Broadway revival (Kern, 1966) of the show, but arguably, a listen to 'Can't help lovin' dat' man', also in this recording, exemplifies such vocal practice in a pinpointing way.
7. Belting is in the American musical commonly perceived as a speech-like voice quality based on so-called chest register but taken to relatively high pitches. It is high in intensity and in volume, and often described as 'brassy', or 'twangy' (see e.g. Kayes, 2015).
8. Many of the musicals on Broadway within these two decades are originally of European origin but have become a part of the standard-repertoire in the American scene. For example, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* is to date Broadway's longest running show.
9. The *fach* system is based on categorizing voices, not only with regard to range, but to timbre, voice size, vocal agility, weight of the voice, as well as the singer's appearance and personality (Fisher et al., 2019).
10. This revival is not documented with a cast recording; however, a highly exemplifying clip of Mueller's performance may be found here: <https://youtu.be/7XFvhC8Lf3k> (accessed 5 May 2022).
11. Noteworthy, in this award season, another omnivorous performer, Lindsay Mendez, won the Tony Award for 'Best Featured Actress in a Musical'. Mendez is perceived as a Broadway 'belting-star', best known for her Elphaba in *Wicked*. However, she won the category embodying *Carousel*'s Carrie Pipperidge, performing in a legit voice, 'expertly crafted and beautifully sung' (Brantley, 2018).

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### Author biographies

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## Article 2

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## Exploring Original Cast Recordings as “Vocal Scripts”: Navigating “Vocal Omnivorousness” and Learning “The Sungs” of Musical Theatre

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### ABSTRACT

An original cast recording is produced to prolong the musical theatre experience, serving as a sound souvenir, a marketing tool, and a means to a commercial end, contributing to a show’s overall success and impact. However, it also plays a part in performance practices, assisting singers and voice teachers in learning new repertoire, and navigating an omnivorous performance field drawing on a wide variety of vocal and musical styles and aesthetics to tell its stories. In this regard, the original cast recordings take on the status of so-called vocal scripts, here defined as sonic entities choreographing social interactions between players, making them objects of interest in performance research and performing arts pedagogy. Drawing on writings from the fields of musicology, cultural sociology, and voice studies, this article’s theoretical contribution is twofold; (1) on a conceptual level, offering insight into and establishing the term vocal script, and (2) from a vocal pedagogical stance, exploring the ways of listening involved when interacting with a multifaceted vocal script. This article argues for taking the original cast recordings seriously within the theatre profession as material mediators, playing active parts in the formations of vocal behaviors, vocal styles, vocal tastes, and vocal pedagogies.

### KEYWORDS

Performing arts pedagogy;  
performance research;  
musical theatre; voice  
studies; cultural sociology;  
original cast recordings;  
vocal scripts

## Introduction

The original cast recording is an artifact produced to grant a form of permanence to musical theatre’s ephemeral state, serving both as a sound souvenir, a marketing tool, and a means to a commercial end, enabling us to relive what otherwise only survives in present audiences’ memories (Reddick 2018; Dvoskin 2018). The global accessibility of these recordings permits audiences residing outside New York to identify themselves as fans and a part of the Broadway community without ever setting foot in New York or experiencing a Broadway show live. Thus, the original cast recordings contribute to a show’s overall success and impact. Nevertheless, the success of a musical is not limited to fans enjoying a show or buying tickets but can be determined as to whether or not a show’s songs are sung again off their original stage, to what Wolff (2018) names “the power of the music to inspire imitation.” In this regard, the original cast recordings

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become part of musical theatre productions (re-)appearing throughout the United States and abroad, assisting practitioners in learning new repertoires (Reddick 2018). As argued by Edwin, Edwards, and Hoch (2018, 187), “As one listens to cast recordings, one finds that it is standard for Adelaide from *Guys and Dolls* to sing with nasality and Eponine from *Les Misérables* to possess a strong chest-mix belt.” Hence, the original cast recordings play a significant role in learning what Symonds (2014) names “the sung”: the sound of a voice and its vocal practices, and in the making of musical theatre performances and performers.

As a genre, musical theatre draws upon, absorbs, or appropriates whatever musical style needed to suit its purpose and tell its stories, continually expanding and including a wide range of popular musical styles and subgenres to its repertoire (Fisher, Kayes, and Popeil 2019; Kayes 2015; LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014; Edwards 2018). As a result, there is a sense of “omnivorousness”<sup>1</sup> within the profession: a multitude of broad, hybrid, and fragmented musical and vocal taste patterns in the form of incorporated styles, idioms, and practices. Noteworthy, not resulting in an increased vocal specialization among performers but rather to an established artistic expectation that the individual should master this multistylism vocally (LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014). Thus, the term “the sung” within musical theatre does not imply one type of vocal aesthetics but is to be considered as plural, as “the sung” of musical theatre.

To navigate such vocal plurality, such “vocal omnivorousness,”<sup>2</sup> one needs sonic information. Within contemporary musical theatre, the original cast recordings may be the only source of such knowledge, often published long before the written score. Thereby, it is arguable that these recordings take on status as so-called “vocal scripts,” in this article defined as sonic entities choreographing real-time social interaction between players further making them objects of interest in the fields of performance research and performing arts pedagogy. As the life of a show goes on, it might be recorded many times. Still, it is proclaimable that the original cast recording stays a historically favored performance, partly because of a commonly direct composer involvement in its mounting.

Scholars, such as Reddick (2018), have documented the high-status position of the original cast recordings in musical theatre history, but less attention has been given to the recordings’ role in assisting and instructing singers and voice teachers when learning a piece or part. This lack of attention creates a knowledge gap in our understanding of the variety and volume of vocal demands, vocal tastes and vocal behaviors prevalent in musical theatre, and the profession’s many formal and informal pedagogical practices. Singers today do not learn to sing solely through voice lessons and a “master-apprentice model” dominant in the history of singing tuition but through a line of explicit and implicit learning environments such as gigs, recording studios, choirs, churches, online tutoring, and imitating other singers (Harrison and O’ Bryan 2014). In formal musical theatre education, students are taught and expected to read noted music but listening and analyzing vocal information to heighten one’s aural, reflexive, and vocal skills is not commonly part of the curricula. This, despite that musical theatre scores, in general, are not well annotated (LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014), lacking indications and distinctions of stylistic and vocal demands, *requiring* excessive sonic information when learning a piece or part.

Drawing on writings from musicology (Cook 1999, 2003, 2014; Johnson 2017; Johnson et al. 2019), cultural sociology (Hennion 2003, 2004, 2015), and voice studies (Kayes 2015; LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014; Sadolin 2021), this article's contribution is seen as twofold. The first contribution emerges at a conceptual level, offering insight into and establishing the term vocal script. Second, a contribution is made by exploring the implications of such a concept to the field of musical theatre. These implications are primarily scrutinized from a vocal pedagogical stance, exploring some of the "listenings" involved when interacting with a multilayered vocal script—hereunder, highlighting the vocal scripts' potential role in learning to sing through the body, not through knowledge about the body. Even though these contributions are considered theoretical, the article is illustrated with examples from a selection of contemporary musical theatre works (Lutvak and Freedman 2014; Pasek and Paul 2017; Miranda 2015; Mitchell 2019), emphasizing the author's insider position within the profession as a singer and a voice teacher. In sum, the current article argues for taking the original cast recordings seriously within the fields of performing arts pedagogy and musical theatre education, defining them as what cultural sociologist Hennion (2015), Hennion (2004) names "material mediators." They are not intermediary tools transporting objective knowledge but productive entities playing active parts in the present-day formation of vocal behaviors, vocal styles, vocal tastes, and, hence, vocal pedagogies.

### Voice in Musical Theatre

Teaching and learning to sing has a long tradition of modeling and imitation as part of its didactics; still, learning to sing by listening to and *copying* others is often considered an unaccepted "shortcut," representing a potential "un-accuracy" when learning new music. One addressed pitfall is the danger of "teach[ing] a given student to be a parrot rather than an intelligent singer" (Berg 2011, 375). Moreover, an active and conscious manipulation of the vocal tract is conjointly looked upon by some vocal teachers and traditions with disdain (Edwin, Edwards, and Hoch 2018). However, when not in disease or anomalous, all singers and speakers can alter their vocal apparatus, hereunder, their vocal fold vibrational patterns, subglottal air pressure, and vocal tract configurations to create diverse and desired vocal outcomes (Edgerton 2014). It is also arguable that within musical theatre, some specifics regarding voice and vocal performance necessitate, enable, and legitimize such a vocal methodological approach.

Voice in musical theatre inhabits what Johnson (2017) calls a vicarious state, where performers express something on behalf of another, utilizing sounds that do not exclusively "belong" to themselves. At the same time, the performers constitute these "others" by giving them voice. A vicarious state enables the notion that each vocal part possesses a so-called "signature sound;" a somatic norm other singers seek to incorporate by adapting a specific setting of the vocal apparatus, commonly constituted by the part's first (Broadway) performance (Benson, Stover, and Snyder 2020, 28). A signature sound is always mixed with a singer's biomechanical trades, such as varying sizes and dimensions of their cavities and anatomical structures. Therefore, it is an approximate array of sounds; in other words, the mapped vocal condition of a part (Benson, Stover, and Snyder 2020).<sup>3</sup>

This idea of signature sounds might be understood connected to an overall contemporary focus on “character-driven” musical theatre works, where the character itself triumphs a celebrity-driven lead performer, making even leads replaceable when successful, long-running shows are branching out (Clum 2018). In this regard, the original cast recordings seemingly assist in creating audience expectations for coherent sounds as well:

When the audience has the opportunity to listen to the recording before seeing a show on stage, it changes their expectations of the live performance. Modern audiences want to hear a consistent performance; they expect that the singing on Broadway, the West End, or on tour will closely resemble what they have been listening to on their devices. (Edwin, Edwards, and Hoch 2018, 185)

Most musical theatre productions require and hire understudies and swings prepared to step in on short notice if main characters are hindered from going on stage. Therefore, ensemble members are cast to blend in vocally with a show’s overall vocal style and with specific parts but at the same time, expected to vocally stand out when voicing smaller roles. Consequently, musical theatre performers, also within the same show, alter their vocal output to make each role recognizable by making their voices “unrecognizable,” the same way one would change costumes or alter body gestures.

This notion of signature sounds can further be contemplated connected to a prevalent “industry standard” in the profession, proclaiming that vocal sounds should always be produced in line with “the current-moment market standards as measured in only two places—Broadway and/or the West End in London” (LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014, 54). Thereby, aesthetics in present-day musical theatre, despite their plurality, are treated and transmitted quite strictly and stabilized, focusing on the “appropriate” sound for each piece and part. For example, current casting directors claim they want to hear new takes on songs, but a unique approach to acting is considered more common than altering vocal styles:

If a performer enters an audition room and sings “Adelaide’s Lament” with Italianate vowels or “On My Own” in head-mix, she has no chance of booking the show [. . .] they do not want to hear “Maria” from *West Side Story* performed with vocal fry and riffing. They do, however, want to hear a nice legato line with appropriate registration, timbre, and judicious use of vibrato that will appeal to modern taste. (Edwin, Edwards, and Hoch 2018, 187)

Despite such expressed vocal aesthetical strictness, if comparing older cast recordings, for example, *Oklahoma* from 1943 (Rodger 2009), with revival recordings of the same show, for example, *Oklahoma* on Broadway in 2019 (Rodger 2019), it is arguable that the vocal behaviors in musical theatre, are somehow and somewhat evolving and changing. Also, within a specific style. Hence, it is seemingly with vocal aesthetics in musical theatre, as with other musical tastes: they “continuously change, without changing, never stop moving, while thinking themselves eternally the same” (Hennion 2003, 5).<sup>4</sup>

### What Is in a Vocal Script?

The term vocal script offered in this article draws upon the writings by musicologist Nicholas Cook about music as *sonic* and *social* scripts. According to Cook (1999, 2003, 2014), to consider music as text is to see music as an object that is reproduceable in and

through performance. However, to think of it as *script* is to see it as choreographing real-time social interactions between players, underlining music *as* performance, not as the performance *of* music. Thereby, the object of music analysis is found in the social interactions between performers and the acoustic traces they leave and not necessarily found in the written score. Connecting this way of thinking to voice and vocal performance, Johnson et al. (2019, 37) underline the “efficacy of the voice to serve as a hub of the ‘work concept’ [...] tracing meaning on the throats of singers and bodies of listeners, rather than exclusively on the blots of ink on a piece of the musical manuscript.” As an example, the part of Evan Hanson in *Dear Evan Hanson* (Pasek and Paul 2017) is by many considered Ben Platt’s singing. It is considered his “bari-tenor voice,” performing highly audible changes between a darker mid-range “full voice” and a strong *falsetto*, adding creaky onset, audible vocal breaks, airy sounds, and a small, relatively rapid vibrato, using “shadow vowels,” and ad-lib ornamentations. These are all elements of a vocal practice invisible or “non-notable” in the written score but audible in the original cast recording, making the recording the social script to interact with. In other words, Ben Platt’s voice does not merely express the work, but these expressions are part of what constitutes the work itself; the sung is no longer a secondary practice or articulation of the song. This way of thinking challenges established notions in musical theatre that written music and text are stable components, transmitting or carrying objective knowledge or truth to be reproduced. Further, it opposes the composer’s sole authorship in creating musical theatre works, where performers,’ librettists,’ or choreographers’ roles are historically highly reduced, commonly to preserve a “seriousness of the genre and the musical work” (Morris 2018, 22).

Even though written works and composers inhabit a high status in musical theatre, it is not a “theatre secret” that writing a musical’s vocal part is commonly done in collaboration with its main performers, resulting in songs that play on their strengths or flatter their vocal shortcomings (Wolf 2018). Lin-Manuel Miranda supposedly revised “The Schuyler Sisters” in *Hamilton* (Miranda 2015) to include tight vocal harmonies after hearing the cast sisters Phillipa Soo, Renée Elise Goldsberry, and Jasmine Cephas Jones singing R&B songs in their dressing room (Benson, Stover, and Snyder 2020). This song’s signature ending was supposed to be performed by the orchestra, but Miranda replaced it with a virtuoso vocal harmony line, making the sung part of the compositional material. Miranda has also stated that the role of Lafayette is written the way it is because of Daveed Diggs being a technically gifted rapper; therefore, a fast tempo became the character’s trajectory skill (Benson, Stover, and Snyder 2020). In addition, Miranda wrote his main character, Hamilton, for himself to perform. In other words, Miranda writes vocal parts with a sonic voice already in mind. In this part of the process, performers and composers often interact with vocal scripts outside the musical theatre profession, granting additional sonic information to singers when auditioning, rehearsing, and forming original parts. In *Hamilton*, the original casting call described Peggy Schyler as Michelle Williams from *Destiny’s Child*, the part of Maria Reynolds, as Jasmine Sullivan meets Carla from *Nine*. In the latter, Miranda specifically wished for a singer with Sullivan’s low part of the voice, with a distinctive “rasp” merging with the modern Broadway “belter” (Benson, Stover, and Snyder 2020). This collaborative nature of musical theatre (Lovensheimer 2018) adds a new layer of understanding to our conceptualizing of the vocal script. Even if earlier argued that the part of Evan Hanson *is* the voice of Benn Platt, multiple people

were actively involved in forming this voice, all adding different layers to the sung. A vocal script must consequently be seen as a collaborative script, comprising, among other things, the singers' bio-acoustical vocal traits, their personal tastes and artistic values, and the choices, preferences, and demands of the producers, directors, composers, lyricists, musical directors, recording technicians, and even the audiences through a new musical's many workshops and out-of-town tryouts. Thereby, vocal-musical works within musical theatre are to be seen as thick aesthetic events, and what we identify as Ben Platt's "authentic," constitutional voice is to be seen as a collaborative, encultured, and citational voice, both in practice and being.

Arguably, conceptualizing the original cast recordings as vocal scripts raises the status of musical theatre performers in line with what may be called the "performative turn" in musicology and theater science, introducing, among other things, a flatter conceptual thinking of the ontology between the written score and its constitutive performances. Scholars within this tradition (Fischer-Lichte 2008) consider "performance as a source of signification in its own right" (Cook 1999, 247), defining performance as a creative, constitutive practice, not as a matter of "getting things right." In this regard, it is important not to fall into the trap of making a vocal script merely a new text or truth to be reproduced, reading it as an audible book of rules or a judgment of a universal, correct performance. There is an openness to a social script; it inhibits and offers the possibility and quality of change. It fosters local meaning and actions and, as previously described, interacts with the biomechanics of a specific body, acting as a living entity in the ongoing negotiation and renegotiating of vocal tastes and practices, referring Hennion (2015), Hennion (2004). Consequently, some singers agree and offer themselves to the script, making an almost exact sonic photocopy of its aural notation. Others will refuse to speak it, speak *with* it, they will dismiss it in total or actively act against it, or choose to flip it, opening up experimentations, alterations, and modifications of both form and meaning, constantly varying across time and space. When performing within a new setting, concept, or context, the song and the sung may be subverted or allocated new practices. As theatre director Stephen Wadsworth (quoted in Burke 2000, 176) describes it, "Characters live in the ether until actors come along and embody them"; or as Hennion (2015) claims, music is nothing without its mediators, without its instruments, languages, scores, performers, and stages. Music must always be made and made again, offering performers a space of agency within and between genres, styles, tastes, and traditions. In musical theatre, musical theatre singers commonly act in a vocally freer way when relocating into new narratives. "Broadway backwards" is one of these concepts, which through gender-bending brings new characters and voices into being, introducing new sounds of cultural, social, and economic categorizations such as geographies, gender, class, age, and race. Concepts and sounds that slowly but steadily make their way into main musical theatre stages as well.

### **Interacting with a Vocal Script**

When exploring the concept of vocal scripts from a vocal pedagogical stance, an intentional listening is our primary methodological tool. Singers and voice teachers act as what Mitchell (2014) defines as "expert listeners" able to decipher vocal patterns and behaviors, making rapid judgments about subtle audible changes, combining available perceptual

cues and clues to determine the physiological and technical processes involved in creating specific voice qualities, vocal effects, and musical idioms. In other words, we listen not to achieve an aesthetic experience but to gain technical and vocal information, to learn singing and *how* to sing. Even though speech scientists and voice clinicians increasingly use computers and software to evaluate and explore voices acoustically, this is a limited practice in the voice studio as it is arguable that the listening ear is surviving as “the most vital tool” for detecting acoustic variation and determining its status within or against sustainable use (Shewell 2009, 172). However, vocal sound labeling, the terminology of voice we use to categorize, is not a straightforward matter or unanimously implemented throughout the vocal scene (Melton 2007). Within musical theatre, there is a continuous debate regarding aural perception and physiological explanation of terms such as, among others, “head,” “chest,” “belt,” “twang,” and “mix” (Edwin 2007; LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014). The language differences between singing pedagogy and voice science are one factor in this debate; singing teachers drawing on their personal experiences, creating different branches of hegemonic oral cultures, is another (Harrison and O’Byran 2014). Many influential vocal methodologies are besides trademarked entities, hereunder Complete Vocal Technique (CVT), the Estill Voice model, and Speech Level singing, each containing and implementing specific terminology (Hoch 2018).

“Voice’s source is not the singer; it is the listener,” writes Eidsheim (2019); it is the listener who assigns meaning to voice, depending on their understandings and frames of reference. Therefore, a question of “Who am I, who hears this?” (Eidsheim 2019, 24) is relevant to ask, when interacting with a vocal script, as it is arguable that how we listen, what we listen for, and how we value our listening, are closely related to, among other things, our history of vocal training. For example, the vocal language, categorizations, and technical references in this article stem from and are shaped by my training within Complete Vocal Technique (McGlashan, Aaen, and Sadolin 2016; Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2017, 2019, 2020; Sadolin 2021). Consequently, elements I would listen for and give value in a vocal script would be (1) the most present “vocal mode,”<sup>5</sup> (2) changes between these vocal modes, (3) the vowels involved: modified or “clear,” (4) the amount of “twang” in the sound: necessary or distinct,<sup>6</sup> (5) the degree of “metal”<sup>7</sup> and (6) “density”<sup>8</sup> in the sound, (7) the “sound color,”<sup>9</sup> and (8) the use of additional “vocal effects.”<sup>10</sup> (See Table 1 for an extended list). I would, however, not listen for the overall *timbre*,<sup>11</sup> a term commonly used to describe the prominent tone, imprint, or “vocal quality” of a voice (Eidsheim 2019); or listen according to the deployment of musical theatre terms such as “legit,”<sup>12</sup> “mix,”<sup>13</sup> or “belt.”<sup>14</sup> Within Complete Vocal Technique, these terms are seen as too large of vocal categories, made up of other smaller technical and behavioral bricks and pieces that are considered more efficient and fruitful to pay attention to.

When interacting with these or other elements in a vocal script, it is important to remember that in recordings, all aesthetic and expressive choices become technical, and all technical choices become aesthetic or expressive. This intricacy of recorded voices demands voice teachers and singers to learn about recording techniques, mixing, mastering, equalization, compression, reverb, auto-tune, and microphones and distinguish between the sounds made acoustically in the vocal apparatus from those added or manipulated in the recording studio. A practice of editing flaws is present in most recordings; adding sound effects may result in “smoothed-out” voices, taming the live



**Table 1.** Examples of the non-notable vocal demands found in a vocal script.

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Examples of Non-Notable Vocal Demands Found in a Vocal Script
The use of vocal modes (Neutral, Curbing, Overdrive, Edge)
Switching between vocal modes (commonly perceived as registration and registers)
Sound color
Height/position of the larynx
Open or closed nasal passage
Position or shape of tongue
Position or shape of the soft palate
The amount of audible twang, distinct, or necessary
Degree of metal in the sound
Degree of density of the sound
Vocal breaks
Volumes (often versus intensity)
Onset treatments: in neutral (often airy), in a metal mode (commonly perceived as glottal), or in curbing (commonly perceived as mixed)
Vowel modifications (in regard to pitch and volume)
Additional vocal effects combined with or without note: Growl, Creaking, Grunt, Rattle, Distortion, air, moans, screams, laugh, cry
Ornamentation
Use of vibrato
Types of vibrato: laryngeal, hammer, or pulsations
Use of straight-toning
Intonation
Sliding into and of notes
Bending of notes
Phrasings
Dialects
Placement of text
Consonant treatment
Word painting (shortening of notes, e.g. bang, zip, knock—sounding like the words described)
Spoken ad-libs
Melodic ad-libs
Melodic modifications
Shadow vowels
Duration of notes
Speed, timing, ritardando, and accelerando

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vocal sound when adapted to a recorded medium. More compressed sounds are often at play; the mastering may equalize volumes, making the aural recognition of different vocal traits harder to identify and disrupting what Symonds (2018) describes as “the natural color” of the voice. Adding layers of vocal takes on top of each other, such as presenting loud volumes with audible air to the sound, may also promote vocal behaviors that are not sustainably performed in a healthy manner when done so live. The use of technical equipment might “unbalance” the score, leading us to think that we may use, among other things, softer volumes than possible to implement live in a theatre setting. Or on the other hand, the original cast recordings may be produced by turning up vocal volumes, making us believe that an acoustic voice can match a live band of loud, electronic, amplified instruments. For example, comparing the filmed Disney+ version of a staged original *Hamilton* cast (Kail 2020) with its original Broadway cast recording (Miranda 2015), the two arguably have audible differences. Overall, higher volumes are presented in the “live” version than on the recordings. The live show also came across as using more vocal effects; both perceived as intentionally implemented in a healthy manner, but also effects emerging from a slightly inefficient vocal tract setting, maybe as a result of fatigue,

overperforming, or pushing the boundaries of one's vocal technique. Additionally, resulting in the perception of a more unstable pitch in the live version compared to the recorded.

### Learning to Sing by the Language of Sounds

Interacting with a vocal script inhabits not only the possibility to train and gain proportional, physiological vocal knowledge, but it also fosters and opens up for an experiential form of vocal knowledge and listening, a listening made possible because a vocal script is a script written with a particular alphabet in mind: the alphabet of vocal sounds. This way of interacting with a vocal script can be described as an "aural to oral listening," a "kinesthetic listening," or merely as simple as "copying;" a purposive listening, where we understand and learn vocal technique and singing through tacit and practical knowledge, internalizing the musical and vocal elements from the recordings into our bodies and behavioral patterns (Green 2016; Johansen 2013). Thereby, we do not stand outside of the sung, but we let the sung do upon us, teach us, instruct us, and inspire us, utilizing our vocal tract's ability to mirror the other singer's vocal tract's moldings and settings. In other words, we learn to sing *through* the body, not through knowledge *about* the body (Taylor 2013). Implicitly, acknowledging that in singing, one can often do much more than one can tell, and defining listening as not only an activity of the ear and the mind but of the whole body.

Aurally based mimicking, copying a specific vocal sound, as, for example, presented on a recording, may lead to a usable and efficient setting of our vocal apparatus, creating a desired vocal aesthetical output, resolving technical vocal challenges, releasing vocal constrictions, or, in some other ways, unblocking different vocal obstacles. Copying an intensive, high-volume, high-pitched sound sung in Edge,<sup>15</sup> for example, one might heighten their regular position of the larynx, relax the soft palate, add some nasality through a small opening of the nasal passage, broaden the mouth's opening, add more twang, or alter or change the vowel in question, for example, from a more Norwegian version of "AH," as in "palm," to a more American English version of "A" as in "trap." This active change, *manipulation* if you may, in/of the vocal tract setting may further influence the voice's respiratory system and, possibly, adjust, or change the vibratory pattern at the vocal cord level. By repeating the phrase or sound multiple times, a new muscular memory in the vocal apparatus may be created,<sup>16</sup> changing the voice's physiology and "go-to" vocal behavior. From a "pure" state of this mimicked sound, an alteration of the vocal output to a more preferred aesthetic liking is possible by, for example, opening the mouth more, rounding its corners, closing the nasal passage, or lowering the larynx a bit, thereby creating a larger acoustic space resulting in a darker sound color to your high intensity, belted out, sound.<sup>17</sup> This ability of our bodies to mirror the activities of others has been gaining increasing attention in numerous areas of study, including the field of musical theatre, here exemplified through the writings of Rodosthenous (2014): "voice and song in musical theatre have the capacity to mode audiences through pre-motor responses and mirror neurons that create a mimetic response to the portray of emotion in the voice and body of the performer" (46). In the practice of teaching and learning voice, such a mimetic response is not limited to audience effects but is implemented in voice training as a pedagogical tool (Shewell 2009). Consequently, this way of working with

voice emphasizes the need for the singing teacher to be a *singing* teacher, able to produce a range of desired and required vocal qualities in musical theatre, as argued, among others, by LoVetri Saunders-Barton, and Weekly (2014).

### **Opening up and Closing Down: Knowing What to Keep and What to Toss Away**

Interacting with a vocal script not only fosters the ability to decipher or replicate vocal behavior but demands an awareness and expertise to make rapid decisions about what part of the vocal script to interact with socially. Here, a vocal script requires and trains not only aural and vocal skills, but also skills in reflexivity: a sense of *mise-en-scène*, a feeling of the environment of a thick vocal event, seeing voice as a multilayered and always situated, resulting in an intricate process of knowing and creating what is involved, what to keep, and what to toss away. Arguably, if an original cast recording showcases a specific vocal behavior, for example, the use of “belt,” as performed by the role of Eliza Schuyler/performer Phillipa Soo in *Hamilton*, then high pitched, intense, belted sounds are on the table, even though the way people belt may technically be executed in a variety of manners (Flynn, Trudeau, and Johnson 2018; McGlashan, Aaen, and Sadolin 2016).<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, an exactness of vocal output might be of meaningful importance, as perceived when replicating with exactness, note by note, Ben Platt’s previously described audible vocal breaks.<sup>19</sup> At other times, a sound is seen as replaceable with other, similar vocal outputs without losing its explicit or implicit meaning. Take the use of excess vocal effects as an example. In the musical *Hadestown* (Mitchell 2019) and the song “Our Lady of the Underground,” Persephone/performer Amber Gray uses “Growl,” a vocal effect defined as vibrations made by the arytenoid cartilages “drumming” on the epiglottis (Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2020). In *Dear Evan Hanson* (Pasek and Paul 2017) and the song “Good for You,” Heidi/performer Rachel Bay Jones uses “Distortion,” a vocal effect created by vibrations of the false vocal cords (Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2020). Both examples allow for using “non-pretty,” “rough,” excess vocal sounds to enhance specific parts, but each in a different way and with different purposes. The way Amber Gray uses Growl may be performing lavishness, a playfulness linked to the meanings of sensuality and the abundance of nature and growth when Persephone is spending her months away from the underworld, creating a spring for humankind. Rachel Bay Jones, on the other hand, might use Distortion to create “realism” in her sound, performed more as a token of not controlling what sounds emerge when in despair or greave. The first vocal effect, the Growl, might not easily be replaced by another vocal effect because it is linked to the song and the show’s genre stylism, citing and using idioms linked to, among other things, New Orleans jazz. If one were to perform this vocal effect as, for example, Distortion, it might lead to a too “rock-ish” sound, referencing or creating a subtext that is perhaps unwanted in the scene by the performer, composer, or director. The vocal effect of Rachel Bay Jones, however, could maybe be performed as “Creaking,” where the vocal effect is produced by vibrations on the vocal cord level (Sadolin 2021) or as a “Rattle,” vibrations made by the arytenoids cartilages “drumming” toward one other (Aaen,

McGlashan, and Sadolin 2020), because the vocal effect constitutes a state where we cannot control what comes out of our mouths, but for sure, it does not “sound all pretty.”

Noteworthy, vocal scripts can be seen closing down vocal behavior as well; for example, all the above-described vocal effects are unheard in a piece such as *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* (Lutvak and Freedman 2014), where vocal performances are built on even vocal sound, legato lines, and aesthetics from classical singing techniques and traditions. Conventionally, an intensive use of vocal effects would break the show’s stylism and are not found on the cast recording. However, as vocal styles, traditions, and tastes are not stable entities; a singer might choose to implement some anyway, adding and expanding understandings and performances of the musical work. This highlights the (potentially) open character of a vocal script, situated and context dependable, and illuminates the role of individual behavior in creating social structures, such as musical styles or genres. Consequently, interacting with a vocal script offers singers and voice teachers the possibility to stabilize already existing vocal aesthetical traditions and values within the musical theatre industry, but it also grants us the possibility to empower and equip us to see ourselves and *act*, as active members of the musical theatre business’s future aesthetical values and practices, changing and adding new vocal practices and sounds to the profession, to styles, and to genres, as we sing along.

## Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

This article argues that learning a piece or part in musical theatre is not done by studying the written score alone; sonic information is crucial to the process as the sung is only perceivable by its mediators, human or material. Consequently, reflexive listening skills and aurally based mimicry are considered pedagogically viable, even desirable, tools to help navigate vocal omnivorousness and technically and stylistically learn the many songs of present-day musical theatre. Arguably, such practices highlight a prevalent “aural tradition” (Fisher, Kayes, and Popeil 2019, 709) within the genre, making the profession’s learning strategies and aesthetic values move closer to a wide variety of rhythmical or popular music instead of in the direction of opera or other classical singing traditions. For instance, musical theatre’s learning strategies bear close similarities to practices within jazz, where musicians frequently make exact copies of a piece by ear as a way to add to their repertoire of sounds, tools, licks, and runs (Hughes 2017), and learning from musicians better than oneself through interacting with recordings is an accepted way of working on vocal and musical skills (Johansen 2013).<sup>20</sup> An interesting aspect considering that many voice teachers in musical theatre are classically trained and educated (Bartlett 2020; LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly 2014). A paradox that, on the other hand, might belong to the reasons why vocal-aural analyses are not commonly included in musical education curricula.<sup>21</sup> Worth underlining in this regard, interacting with a vocal script is not to be seen as replacing a traditional “master/apprentice” dynamic within the profession. It is more seen as *expanding* it, “outsourcing” parts of the voice teacher’s actions and tasks by inviting another teacher into the room in the form of a recording. Thus, making it possible regardless of location to learn from and interact with the “best in the business,” the performers originally cast to constitute renowned musical theatre

works. Thereby, the original cast recordings in their form as material mediators not only play a part in the making of musical theatre performers and performances, but they stabilize, form, and create a close relationship within the global scene of musical theatre; a network of vocal aesthetics,<sup>22</sup> which in turn, and at the same time, stabilizes and reinforces North America and Broadway as the pinnacle for contemporary musical theatre today.

As previously noted, little attention has been given to the role of original cast recordings in assisting and instructing performers in learning a piece or part. Therefore, the current article's implications for future research may lead to different pathways. When moving forward, it can be fruitful to ask didactical and pedagogical questions of how vocal-aural analysis and aural reflexivity are, and might be, taught and included in formal education. For example, more thoroughly investigate the types of listening involved when interacting with a vocal script as we "often take for granted the phenomenal processing skills at work when we hear a singing voice" (Mitchell 2014, 188). We can further seek to understand how interacting with a vocal script is experienced connected to areas such as "career preparation" and "employability" or to artistic values such as "personal expression" or "authenticity." Another interesting route would be to move in the direction of Eidsheim (2019), applying a "critical performance practice" view on the listener, researching who those interacting with a vocal script are and how they listen to their own listening. Finally, we could also follow in the footsteps of Hennion (2003); Hennion (2004; 2015), asking if and how these vocal scripts as material mediators are part of negotiating, forming, and equipping contemporary vocal tastes and vocal practices among, for example, musical theatre students. In sum, different pathways that all would gain new knowledge of the dynamics of vocal tastes, vocal demands, and vocal behaviors in contemporary musical theater and increase our insight into the multiple arrays of ways various vocal genres, styles, and traditions are created, transmitted, and taken off their page.

## Notes

1. Utilizing the term omnivorousness draws on a sociological framework by Richard Peterson about cultural omnivorousness and the cultural omnivore, denoting developments of taste processes, where consumers in Western countries were found to have an increased breadth of cultural taste and willingness to cross established hierarchical genre boundaries. In other words, a "qualitative shift in the basis for marking elite status" (Peterson and Kern 1996, 900) from refinement and exclusion to plurality and breadth.
2. Within musical theatre, we might even speak of an "omnivorous voice," a term, implying that the human voice is not singular or innate but culturally formed, inhabiting a wide variety of vocal outputs and aesthetic possibilities that both formal and informal, explicit and implicit, vocal training will amplify or dampen.
3. For example, the lowest of the three Fates in *Hadestown* (Mitchell 2019) is showcasing a very dark sound color. Replicating this sound, possibly constructed by a somewhat extraordinary large acoustic space in performer Jewelle Blackman's vocal tract, might be unachievable, or be perceived as "pushing" the limits of a low female voice in a non-sustainable way, when replicated by others with a smaller vocal tract. However, a more restrained darkening of the vocal output may be added to all voices as part of "metaphoring" the role "the fate of death."
4. In this article, Hennion (2003, 5) investigates, among others, the development of tastes within classical music and jazz, claiming that when it comes to the latter, "records have written jazz's library. Its living history is the fruit of mechanical recording."

5. CVT identifies, defines, and teaches the four modes of singing categorized as Neutral, Curbing, Overdrive, and Edge, based on audio perception, laryngostroboscopic imaging, acoustics, long-time-average spectrum, and EGG (Sadolin 2021; Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2019).
6. Twang is defined as a narrowing of the epiglottic funnel between the petiole and the arytenoid complex, whereby the sound becomes clearer and nonbreathy and the volume potentially increases. (Sadolin 2021).
7. The vocal modes Overdrive and Edge imply a dominant second harmonic, as well as progressive constriction of supraglottic structures, defining and making them audible recognizable as "metallic" (Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2017).
8. In so-called "reduced density" an elongation of the vocal folds is observed as an accomplishment of the "thyroid cartilage tilting forward, stretching of the mucosa covering the cricoid-arytenoid complex and the posterior cricoid, and an upward posterior, slightly superior, contraction of the middle constrictor muscle in the pharyngeal wall" (Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2019, 806.e09).
9. Within CVT, the term sound color is linked to an acoustic principle that a larger vocal tract creates a darker sound and a smaller vocal tract lighter. The position of the larynx, the amount of twang, closing/opening of the nasal passage, the shape of the mouth opening, the position and shape of the tongue, and the raising/relaxing of the soft palate will all alter the size of the vocal tract and impact the sound color (Sadolin 2021).
10. CVT identifies, defines, and teaches vocal effects, such as Distortion, Rattle, Growl, Grunt, Creak, Creaking, air added to the voice, screams, vocal breaks, vibrato, and ornamentation technique, each formed by various supraglottic structures, most not interfering with the vibratory pattern of the vocal folds (Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2020).
11. Timbre is commonly defined "as the attribute that causes a listener to hear dissimilarity between two tones of the same loudness and pitch" (Erickson and Phillips 2020, 231). CVT considers timbre a perceptual artifact defined by the choice of vocal mode, the amount of metallic character amount of density in the note, the chosen sound color, and the natural size of the larynx and the vocal tract, see Aaen et al. (Aaen, et al., in press).
12. Within musical theatre, "legit voice" is predominantly used to describe voice production strategies built on Western classical Lyric singing techniques and traditions, valuating, among others, the use of laryngeal vibrato, legato lines, evenness across register, and a "covered" sound compared to so-called "belted" sounds. See, e.g. Kayes (2015).
13. "Mixed voice" is predominantly used to describe voice production strategies perceived as either TA or CT muscle activity dominant in connection to pitch and so-called registers; however, the research on the concrete definition of mixed voice is relatively sparse (Aaen, McGlashan, and Sadolin 2019).
14. Within musical theatre "belting" is commonly perceived as a speech-like voice quality based on what many thinks of as a "chest register" taken to relatively high pitches; high in intensity, often described as "brassy" and "twangy." See Kayes (2015) or LoVetri, Saunders-Barton, and Weekly (2014).
15. Within CVT, Edge is defined as a fuller to reduced metallic sound, with fuller to reduced density, commonly described as a somewhat "aggressive" sound with a "sharp" or "screamy" character. However, in reduced density, the sound can be perceived as more contained (McGlashan, Aaen, and Sadolin 2016; Sadolin 2021).
16. The notion of "muscular memory" is based on a practice repeating the same vocal action until the brain remembers it, and the muscle will get used to responding in a certain, automatically way (Sadolin 2021).
17. Even though, in this article, aurally based mimicry is exemplified through a translation into words, imitation is often considered a way of avoiding "verbal overshadowing" in vocal processes (Mitchell 2014, 195), a phenomenon describing that verbalizing voice may reduce the ability to, even hinder, the discrimination of voices and the memorization of performances.

18. This type of listening could be named a “concept-orientated” listening (Johansen 2013, 89) where one identifies and copies an overall style or a main idiom, for example, “air added to the sound” as implemented by Eurydice, Eva Noblezada, in the song “Flowers” from *Hadestown* (Mitchell 2019); however, not copying its exact placements but “playing around” with the idiom, connected to one’s personal understanding of its potential implementational possibilities and meanings.
19. This could be seen as a “detailed oriented” copying (Johansen 2013, 85), where copying is done in the form of an exact replication or transcription of the vocal script.
20. In jazz, this practice is commonly described as an “oral” musical tradition, not “aural,” see, e.g. Johansen (2013).
21. In so-called classical or Western-lyrical traditions, the written work commonly embodies a significantly high status and is seen as the primary source of interpretation, an attitude, among others, connoted in the German term “*werktreue*.”
22. A network here is considered the relationship of mediators, a “heterogeneous series, increasingly tightly interwoven, polarized and channeled into stable realities” (Hennion 2015, 9).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Article 3

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# We are also music lovers: Testing vocal tastes in higher musical theater education

Research Studies in Music Education

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## Abstract

This article explores taste processes within a group of musical theater students and their voice teacher, the latter also acting as researcher, while working with an aesthetically broad repertoire in a higher education setting in Norway. The study is designed using an action research approach, and the collected data—students' reflection notes, the researcher's field notes, and workshop recordings—are analyzed through Antoine Hennion's theoretical framework of taste as a performance that acts, engages, transforms, and is felt, and which involves skills and sensitizing. In the social sciences, taste is commonly regarded as a matter of cultural consumption. This article argues that tastes are also part of cultural production: musicians, here musical theater performers, are to be seen as music lovers, performing tastes that stabilize or challenge established taste patterns in the form of styles, genres, or traditions. Accounting for situations where tastes are performed, tested, and negotiated, this article argues that tastes have a history but are brought into a negotiating presence, producing implications for the future; in this case, tastes form vocal behaviors and vocal behaviors form tastes. Hence, in musical theater education, taste, taste-making, and taste-testing are part of systematic and formal pedagogics and students' ongoing vocal training.

## Keywords

action research, Antoine Hennion, musical theater, taste, vocal training, voice

The Perspectives Series is a scholarly forum for authors to present ideas and perspectives in music education. Perspectives may seek to engender debate from a personal values position or stake a claim on a new methodological, philosophical or pragmatic 'space'.

## Introduction

With its cross-disciplinary reach, *taste* is a core concept in the social sciences (Arsel & Bean, 2018; Wright, 2015), that through history has evolved from a metaphor of bodily necessities into multiple concepts of mind, perception, and aesthetic valuation (Vercelloni, 2016). In

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recent decades, taste has commonly been researched as a phenomenon within cultural consumption (Bennett et al., 2008; Peterson, 1992; Pomiès et al., 2021; Warde, 2018), and within music it has been explored in relation to audiences', fans', and listeners' taste patterns and preferences (Nault et al., 2021; Vlegels & Lievens, 2017). Such research is arguably highly influenced by the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), linking taste to distinction and, implicitly, to inequality, defining it as a structural element of class hierarchies connected to *cultural capital*. Many scholars within musicology and music education follow this trajectory (Bull, 2019; Burnard et al., 2015; Dyndahl et al., 2017), exploring tastes with regard to broader social dynamics and inclusion and exclusion.

In this article, taste is researched from a different angle: exploring tastes among musicians making music. More specifically, taste-making is examined among 10 musical theater students and their voice teacher—the latter in a dual role of teacher and researcher—in a higher education setting. Designed using an action research approach and situated within the frame of a second-year bachelor's course, the study falls in a contemporary trajectory of practice-based taste theorizations foregrounding questions of agency (Pomiès et al., 2021). The empirical data, consisting of audio recordings of workshops, field notes, and students' reflection notes, are analyzed through a theoretical framework developed by French sociologist Antoine Hennion (2015), who defines taste as a performance that “acts, engages, transforms and is felt” (p. 268). Even though tastes recurrently act on a personal level, they are collective techniques built on collaboration; through discussion, sharing, and self-reflexivity, we seek continuous support for our performance of taste (Hennion, 2007, 2010; Teil & Hennion, 2018). Thus, *taste-testing* and *taste-negotiations* make up a significant part of taste-making, turning it into more than a simple act of “yes or no” but instead an ongoing “making aware of.”

This article regards musical theater as a rapidly changing art form, adding and absorbing a range of musical styles into its repertoire (Kayes, 2015; LoVetri et al., 2014). Thereby, the ability to move vocally between genres has become imperative for performers. In addition to living as “triple threats”—performers expected to have mastered the art of singing, dancing, and acting—they are also expected to become highly versatile vocal performers, capable of performing a show in a specific style in the evening, rehearsing another by day, and auditioning for a third, all within various stylistic idioms. This is an expectation manifested in, among other things, musical theater education curricula, and the emphasis upon stylistic plurality means that criteria for aesthetic valuation in musical theater are not obvious and in flux. To explore this complexity of tastes within the musical theater profession, this article is guided by the following research question: *How do students perform, test, and negotiate vocal tastes when exploring a new repertoire in a higher musical theater education course?*

## Previous research

Research on the varieties of musical styles, forms, and contents within musical theater is commonly conducted within musicology. Knapp et al. (2011, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) offer a comprehensive overview labeling musical theater as a paradox regarding its plural roots, its status as art and entertainment, and its numerous contemporary forms (see also Hodge, 2020; Symonds & Taylor, 2013; Taylor, 2012; Taylor & Symonds, 2014; Wollman, 2017). Within musical theater voice research, long-standing beliefs that classical training and aesthetics are superior to other styles are declining (Edwin, 2007; Potter, 1998), allowing contemporary commercial singing (CCM) to garner higher levels of interest (Björkner et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2015; Green et al., 2014; Hoch, 2019; LoVetri et al., 2014; LoVetri & Weekly, 2003; Moore, 2017). *Vocal cross-training*, not only as a means to create marketable

performers but also to secure voice sustainability and health, is high on the agenda (Bartlett, 2020; Edwin, 2008; Greschner, 2019; Wilson, 2021). Other scholars focus on the specifics of a singular style, arguing that the CCM bracket is too broad (e.g., Chandler, 2014; Edwin et al., 2018). Kayes' (2015) work is influential here, exploring how genres shape female singers' vocal behavior.

Commonly, contemporary voice research focuses on the biomechanical and acoustic sides of the vocal apparatus in close dialogue with voice science, intending to secure vocal health and effective vocal teaching (e.g., Aaen et al., 2020; Björkner, 2008; Bourne et al., 2011; Echternach et al., 2014). However, the culture and society in which vocal and musical preferences exist and the bearing these have on the sound qualities of the voice and development of vocal technique are largely undocumented (Harrison & O'Bryan, 2014). In other words, research that scrutinizes the social, culturally formed side of voice and vocal practices is sparse, including research focusing on the formation of vocal behaviors and styles within musical theater and musical theater education.

Research on the role of taste among musicians and other performing artists in creative practices is also an underexplored territory, with some exceptions such as Einarsdóttir's (2020) scrutiny of "learned taste" in the context of an amateur choral ensemble, and Juslin and Isaksson's (2014) comparison between psychology and music students' subjective criteria for choice and aesthetic judgment of music. These research gaps may potentially lead to an understanding of vocal styles, traditions, and genres as stable entities to be reproduced during performance and a belief that taste is only a matter of cultural consumption, not cultural production. This article aims to contribute to a multifaceted view of voice and voice training by researching the role of taste among musicians making music, thus highlighting the *active* role of the individual and the collective in the formation of vocal behaviors and vocal styles.

## Theoretical framework

Labeling his writings a "pragmatics of taste," Hennion (2004, 2007, 2010, 2015) rejects perspectives that define tastes as merely arbitrary, unconscious reflections of social differentiation, education, background, identity games, or power. Even though tastes have a history, music lovers<sup>1</sup> discover their personal tastes and external determinisms, and reinforce or surpass them through ongoing questioning, self-criticism, or testing. Music lovers are, therefore, agentic, competent, reflexive, and inventive actors (Hennion, 2001, 2007, 2010).

According to Hennion, taste is not inert or an attribute, but is formed as it is expressed and expressed as it is formed. To value and know what and how we value, we test ourselves and our objects: uttering what and how one likes, playing, listening, or making others listen or play are already ways of appreciating something more, underlining taste's performative and generative powers and possibilities (Hennion, 2004, 2010, 2015). In other words, taste is something we do. In his writings, Hennion adopts a broad definition of music lovers, including both those with and without an instrument in hand. He labels music lovers as the "starting point for any musical reality as it comes into being" (Hennion, 2015, p. 267). Through collaboration—not competition—music lovers form attachments, improve their skills and sensibilities, and reach compromises between sometimes incompatible criteria for appreciation (Hennion, 2004, 2007). Beginners rely on and test their tastes against more experienced peers, critics, or guides to identify and form preferences, and the plurality of words involved—love, passion, practices, habits, mania, obsessions—indicates taste's many configurations, made apparent through contact: making oneself feel and feeling oneself doing (Hennion, 2003, 2010, 2015). Within this collective, music lovers work on the "musicalification" of their tastes, deciphering details of

records and performances, *equipping* their tastes in the form of instruments, scores, performers, stages, and repertoires (Hennion, 2015; Teil & Hennion, 2018). These are not seen as neutral instrumental intermediators, carrying or dissolving the artwork, but as productive *mediators*, without which music and musical tastes would be impossible to perform (Hennion, 2003, 2015). Building on acts of engagement—such as long-term physical training—tastes take the form of a gradually more refined and defined competent act, produced *in* and *with* music, not just facing it (Hennion, 2004, 2010; Teil & Hennion, 2018).

Consequently, Hennion's pragmatics rejects a dualism between an external and internal analysis of art, between aesthetics and sociology, and between the object tasted and the people who taste (Hennion, 2007, 2017; Pomiès & Hennion, 2021). Taste is not only about liking music; it is also a question of being touched by certain pieces at certain moments with certain people present. Accordingly, sensitizing makes up a large part of tasting because we cannot plan for beauty to come; at the same time, "beautiful things only offer themselves to those who offer themselves to beautiful things" (Hennion, 2004, p. 135).

Hennion encourages researchers to spend time where actors of interest gather and participate in activities in which habits, gestures, and dispositions naturally occur, to create meaningful work close to experiences and practices (Hennion, 2003, 2010; Pomiès & Hennion, 2021). In this article, I have taken this advice as a point of departure for exploring taste-performances, taste-testings, and taste-negotiations among a group of musical theater students and their voice teacher while working with new vocal repertoire.

## Methodology

### *Developing the study*

This study site is a second-year bachelor's course within a higher Norwegian musical theater education. The course was created to examine present-day aspects and trends within musical theater, aiming to enable students to see themselves as active participants in the profession's development. A premise for the course was that it should be research-integrated and offer students practical knowledge on research methodologies within the field. The course took place in January 2021 and lasted 4 weeks. Ten students participated, three women and seven men, all in their early- to mid-20s. I, the female author, age 40, acted in a double role as their voice teacher and researcher. This is a common duality within arts based research, arguing that artists using their own work to study creative processes offers different—maybe not as easily assemblable—knowledge to that of researchers entering the field from outside (Kjørup, 2011). In the course, the pluralities of aesthetics, styles, and genres within musical theater were chosen as a subject, as summarized in the following course goal:

[T]he students should, after the course, both as part of a group and individually, be able to identify, reflect upon and perform different musical and vocal styles prevalent in contemporary musical theatre, and further be able to identify, reflect upon, and perform vocal choices that either stabilize or challenge the field's or the style's established vocal traditions and conventions.

Four musicals were chosen for exploration: *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Lutvak & Freedman, 2014), *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015), *Dear Evan Hanson* (Pasek & Paul, 2017), and *Hadestown* (Mitchell, 2019). These works offer a broad range of musical and vocal styles prevalent in contemporary musical theater: classical, rap, pop, singer/songwriter, folk, and New Orleans jazz, showcasing a wide variety of vocal demands and behaviors. The students worked

**Table 1.** The Three Action Research Cycles and Course Content.

Action research cycle	Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 Digital	1	Self-study	Self-study	Introduction workshop	Self-study	Masterclass
1 Digital	2	Vocal technique workshop	Self-study	Individual singing lessons	Self-study	Individual singing lessons
2 Live	3	Aural analysis Workshop	Self-study	Ensemble workshop	Self-study	Ensemble workshop
3 Digital	4	Self-study	Masterclass	Masterclass	Writing reflection notes workshop	Writing of reflection notes

with parts from all four musicals. In the ensemble workshops, I assigned pieces and parts; in individual singing lessons and masterclasses, the students chose their own repertoire.

To pass the course, the students had to actively attend the workshops and hand in personal reflection notes of 1,500 to 2,000 words. All workshops were recorded, comprising a total of 50 hr of recorded material. Together with the students' reflection notes and my field notes, this formed the empirical data.

### *Research design*

The study can be placed within the broader field of practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), designed using an action research approach and organized into three cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Gjotterud et al., 2017; Kemmis, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The course activities (see Table 1 for an overview) were designed by attending to exploratory practice principles, focusing on understanding more than problem-solving, and involving the students as practitioners in their own right, within their everyday activities (Allwright, 2005). Consequently, workshops, voice lessons, and masterclasses were designed to be a part of the students' existing work-lives and ongoing voice training. Conducted during the COVID-19 breakout, the project's cyclic form became imperative as rules for social distancing constantly changed, demanding a continuous rethinking of the possibilities regarding course content and research activities. Over the 4-week course, the first 2 weeks took place on Zoom; then, a dispensation from the government allowed us to perform music together in week 3. Approaching week 4, this was withdrawn, turning the course and the research yet again into a virtual endeavor.

On the days of self-study, the students worked individually on their chosen and assigned repertoire. In the Introduction Workshop, action research as methodology and theory on the plurality of aesthetics within musical theater were presented and discussed. In the Vocal Technique workshop, a short course in Complete Vocal Technique (Sadolin, 2021) was offered as one way of cross-training voice. In the Aural Analysis Workshop, the students presented their vocal technical and stylistic understanding and aural analyses of the four musicals in question.

### *Ethical considerations*

Conducting an action research inspired practitioner study raises various ethical considerations, foremost regarding the power asymmetry between the students and the teacher-researcher, because the event was both a mandatory educational course and a site for research.



During the course, I positioned myself as a co-learner and co-explorer, repeatedly underlining the students' strong positions as qualified practitioners, spending time discussing action research methodology, values, and its aim to reflect on and improve practices (Kemmis, 2009; Schmuck, 2006). The study was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD). All students signed written consent forms with the opportunity to withdraw at any time. The names presented are fictive, and the use of quotations and their translation from Norwegian to English has been approved by the students in question.

### *Analysis*

The empirical data—workshop recordings, reflection notes, and field notes—were first transcribed, coded, and categorized concerning recurrent themes, similarities, and differences. Second, they were analyzed through a *theoretically driven* reading (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), incorporating Hennion's core concepts and theories to sensitize the material in terms of suggesting where to look while not defining what to see (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Through this theoretical reading, I aimed to identify and code prominent moments where the students and I performed, observed, and reflected on various acts of taste-making and taste-testing. Given the action research approach, a large amount of data was collected. Findings accounted for in this article stem foremost from the students' written reflection notes and my field notes. Excerpts from workshop recordings are primarily included to validate situations and add details to students' or my own reports. The following sections put forward descriptions of noteworthy situations within which (1) tastes were performed, (2) the musical object was central in taste-making, (3) tastes were equipped, (4) possible distastes of others were explored, (5) tastes were negotiated, and (6) the "sound of gender" was tasted.

### **Results**

#### *Performing tastes: "I like what I do and do what I like"*

The first cycle of the course started by exploring participants' paths into musical theater, their vocal challenges and goals, and their "dream roles." The students presented images of being "struck" by musical theater, linking their loves from the past to wishes for their future, as described by Svenn:

Everyone I went to school with hated it. They thought it was so dull. It played in English; they even spoke English [. . .]. So, they [the fellow students] fell asleep after half an hour. I was like: this is so cool. I was obsessed with the musical for many years afterward, with the music. The story is not all that. But I think the music is crazy good. So, if I were to choose a dream role, even though a lot would be fun to do, it has to be the American, Freddy, in *Chess*, because he has so much sickening cool music, and I think it is cool he is a bit rough around the edges, a bit crazy and all that. (Recording)

Deciphering potential dream roles, the students expressed attraction toward complex, emotionally demanding characters with impressive vocal parts. Sarah wanted to play Anastasia from the musical *Anastasia* because everything the character goes through leads to dramatic songs, and Sarah "loves dramatic songs." Peter chose Javert and Phantom because the characters "have depth" and "are vulnerable," and he defines both musicals—*Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*—as "masterpieces." Peter was even motivated to participate in the course because he could explore dream roles:

Some of what drives me, is to embark upon a big and demanding repertoire, usually done by the best of Broadway, and find ways to master it. What kind of a musical theatre artist am I if I don't have dream roles, right? (Reflection note)

Scott, however, found it hard to picture a dream role, arguing that he is not quite "into the musical theatre world." He described a process of "finding his voice"; figuring out what it is suited to do, and *learning* to like it, but he "is not there, yet" (recording). Anna described something similar:

The first that comes to mind is Sophie in *Mamma Mia* or Zoe in *Dear Evan Hanson*. But for me, dance is even closer to [my] heart. An even bigger dream. A dance part. But I feel that I have not come far enough [in my artistic practice] to choose what my dream is. (Recording)

This part of our course made us aware that taste-making and taste-testing not only occurred through verbalization but that it also involved bodies and bodily behavior. Interestingly, it was not only the students' tastes that shaped and impacted their vocal behaviors but also the other way around; the students liked and appreciated what they performed and were *able to* perform. In addition, this cycle made us aware that it was almost impossible to perform a neutral, "untasted sound" (field notes) as the students and I systematically, and unconsciously, perform musical and vocal idioms we appreciate. As described by Yosef,

I have never had much of a vibrato; it has come during the last few years. I am used to singing "clean" [notes], straight ahead, in edge, because I played in a rock band. In a way, it was not "my voice." But it had something cool about it. Then, it was the thing about getting me some vibrato. Because I realized, I think it is really nice. But I didn't know how to produce vibrato. So, this, I have been working on and researching. (Recording)

Katherine observed that her vocal behavior was directly connected to her musical history, performing "So Big, So Small" from *Dear Evan Hanson*:

Some vocal choices, for example, where I placed the vocal breaks, came from an overall understanding of the genre [stadium pop/rock]. Because I have listened so much to the music, the character Heidi is inspired by [. . .] I made unconscious choices that fitted the musical theatre genre. (Reflection note)

Statements like these highlight taste's transformative and generative powers as we build valued vocal behavior into our bodies' physiology. But, the other way around, they also shed light upon how our vocal behaviors form tastes.

### *The object in tasting: "Tasting a musical work that doesn't shy away"*

Sarah was the only student performing from *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* in the first cycle, a musical playing on idioms from the Western lyrical classical tradition. The first time she sang the piece, "I Don't Know What to do Without You," she had a "pop-ish" take on it. I challenged her to try a version embracing the part's commonly preferred singing style: longer legato lines with extended vowels, raising her soft palate, adding a darker sound color, removing creaking onsets, increasing the use of "head voice," and only switching into more speech-like singing in the lower range (recording). She embraced the task in an audibly different manner; however, coming to the middle of the song and the sentence "Why are men so dreary, Monty, and so deadly dull[?]" she abruptly burst into an extreme vocal effect, relatively unheard of for

(especially female) singers in this style. In the close-up from the Zoom camera, two things became visible: Sarah's unprepared reaction to the sound emerging from her mouth and my spontaneous, positive response toward it. Immediately, a message on the live chat pinged from her fellow student Yosef: "I think Sarah just booked the job" (field notes). A discussion unfolded: would this book her the job in all cases, or would this be dismissive, when facing other tastes and values in, for example, a real audition situation? In her reflection note, Sarah described it as "ironic" that this happened when she tried to sing like an opera singer, arguing that it probably happened naturally after "so much singing in such a funny song."

Sarah's story draws attention to the decisive role of the musical object in tasting (Hennion, 2004, 2007). As Sarah focused on more traditional performance conventions, she was in a way "taming" the song from the outside, concentrating on an even vocal line and the beauty of her voice's "timbre." However, the "funniness," the spoken word, and the work's potential meaning "burst" through her planned performance. In both versions, Sarah added elements from the popular musical styles that she claims to prefer (recording). However, in the second one, she showcased the piece's sonic conventions as well, showing us a negotiation between a strong aesthetic performance tradition, the work itself, and her tastes and understandings. If Sarah kept on performing the piece with additional vocal effects, she would expand the frames of what we name a "legit" singing style in musical theater. If not, she would stabilize traditional vocal conventions; hence, both cases show that tastes play an active role in the development of musical styles and genres.

### *Equipping tastes: "I know how hard it is; now I like it better"*

The second research cycle started with aural analyses of the four musicals. In groups of two or three, the students explored the original Broadway cast recordings as so-called "vocal scripts," analyzing performed vocal behaviors. Throughout our course, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* was not as easily liked and embodied as the others. I kept on selling the show as "one of my big favorites" (recording) but was met with resistance, as Ben expressed, "Am I willing to put the work into something that doesn't interest me, in opposition to other genres?" (reflection note). Yosef and Gorm were analyzing the musical, and started their presentation by Yosef stating, "Now I know how hard it is; now I like it better" (recording). Gorm and Yosef's deciphering of the musical material changed their appreciation of the work, showcasing taste as the ability to form fondness from contact with a new thing, not only liking something we already know (Teil & Hennion, 2018).

The aural analyses were revisited throughout the course: what does Ben Platt<sup>2</sup> do when singing "For Forever"? Can we consider Bryce Pinkham<sup>3</sup> a purely "classical singer"? Is Patrick Page<sup>4</sup> singing, talking, or merely "sneering" his low notes? This ongoing dialogue, commonly in the form of imitating phrases and sounds, was intended to identify the performed tastes of "the best in the business," reflecting on already valued vocal practices. In addition, this helped us fix specific vocal challenges such as singing out of pitch, not reaching specific notes, or releasing vocal constrictions. This consequently increased our knowledge of vocal technique, which in turn impacted our taste-making. As described by Ben,

As one who has recently found an interest in vocal technique, I have realized how I have been "delusional" regarding what is considered good technical work and considered "good" [in itself]. In my case, I have been impressed by "riffs and runs" and high notes, etc. But after finding this interest, I am becoming more impressed by [vocal] placements and more technically difficult things. Not that riffs and runs are not hard, but I ended up appreciating more voice qualities, not only the things that at first sight seem difficult. (Reflection note)

The recordings, thereby, became not only objects for our aesthetic delight but the standard by which we loved (Hennion, 2001); containing vocal “laws” that we chose whether or not to live by, and *equipping* our tastes (Hennion, 2015) with knowledge of vocal technique and performance practices.

### *Exploring the (dis-)taste of others: Avoiding an ironic distance while tasting*

As cycle 2 opened up for live activities, we explored selected ensemble parts.<sup>5</sup> The idea of working against an ironic distance when tasting unfamiliar styles emerged as we embarked on the musical *Hamilton*. As the group gathered, the discussion was set in motion. Svenn describes,

The day we should begin to work on *Hamilton*, I said, “I am curious if we can rap seriously.” I referred to how I often think people that are not used to rapping attack it with a sort of ironic distance by throwing in outbursts such as “yo” and waving “hip-ly” with their hands. We ended up talking about this for fifteen minutes. Why is this a form we find hard to take seriously compared with everything else we all the time try out? (Reflection note)

Peter also observed that even though everyone was vocally “well trained,” *Hamilton* was a challenge for most (reflection note), and the students worked hard to approach the piece and the style in a “real” and “authentic” manner (recording). This avoidance of irony was a repeated endeavor. As a genre, musical theater is often considered a “guilty pleasure,” embodying a “too-muchness” with performers bursting into song or dance at “the slightest provocation” (Johnson et al., 2019). Within the genre, there are perceived hierarchies between shows or parts as well. Katherine revealed her “guilty pleasure”:

I am embarrassed to say it, but I am completely honest. I will just put it out there; I love *High School Musical*. I love it. I think it is such a good musical, and I want to star in *High School Musical* as Sharpay. First and foremost, she is so different from me, which is always exciting to embark upon. But you know what, Sharpay is so much more nuanced than people believe. I will fight for this, even though people might think I am lame, but she is a nuanced character. She is misunderstood. (Recording)

This utterance was accompanied by Katherine clapping her hands and adding small screams of excitement, highlighting a high level of enthusiasm and enjoyment in engaging with the musical material. Similar behavior was repeatedly observed through the course: clapping hands, smiles, thumbs up, hearts appearing in the Zoom chat, frequent use of the applause button, the appearance of dance moves, or students singing along in their bedrooms (field notes) were all signs of spontaneous feedback when testing vocal behavior. Although the students acknowledged and addressed the possible (dis-)tastes of others, they commonly kept on proclaiming their intense love for the parts in question. By systematically working on avoiding ironic distance, they surpassed the tastes of others and formed strong(er) attachments to the piece, part, or style in question.

### *Negotiating taste: Taste-making with a fictive other*

In cycle 3, taste-testing became an ongoing activity, moving back and forth within the group and the explored musical material, often involving a fictive or imagined other. Peter kept questioning his tastes and vocal behaviors throughout the project. Describing his voice in the introduction workshop, he negotiates with his musical history:

My voice is, in theory, a dark baryton/functioning bass. Good fullness. Good power. I would say I have a large range. I can work in the deeper registers and the higher. It is hard to tell. It is probably a welding of every artist one grew up with. I have listened a lot to Sinatra, Jonny Cash, Elvis [. . .]. It has perhaps become a small “compote” of that. (Recording)

Performing “Hey Little Songbird” from *Hadestown*, he negotiates with benchmarked performances by Broadway stars:

The darkest note of “Hey Little Songbird” is G1 [ASPN]. I felt it was weak and constricted. But when I tried to sing the lowest note with “an airy flicker” to it, I felt I cracked the code. I have a totally different sound color than Page,<sup>6</sup> so I will never do it the same way as him. But then again, that is not what I want. (Reflection note)

He negotiates with a fictive casting agent:

When I was asked if I would audition for the part, I answered, “yes.” Admittedly, Hades is an old man, but it struck me that the part suits a younger actor as well. Then again, Hades is an immortal god. (Reflection note)

He negotiates with the material and me as the voice teacher:

In *Hadestown* [. . .], it is wise not to be afraid of the ugly. By that, I mean that the musical is so close to folk, a genre where the magic lies in what is not perfect. I got feedback from Guro [me] to try to make my Hades “less Elvis,” something I feel exemplifies my point. (Reflection note)

Peter is also seen negotiating with himself, actively expanding his tastes:

When choosing a solo song on one of the last days, I decided on “If I Could Tell Her” from *Dear Evan Hansen* [. . .]. I wanted to try a song from that musical because I identify so little with it. Regarding taste and style, I am more connected to *Hadestown*. [. . .] [“If I Could Tell Her”] is a song with some “jumps” from chest voice to falsetto. It makes it a bit more “pop-ish,” but I wanted to take it on board. I think the music is very good, and I am learning to see myself in these types of roles as well. (Reflection note)

He negotiates with the profession in general, implicitly his ongoing education:

I perceive that I have a pretty broad range in my voice but am commonly placed in a box with the low voices. I don’t see this as negative because I am a dark baryton, but I want to be a flexible actor, not just one you turn to for punch<sup>7</sup> and bass. (Reflection note)

By continuously negotiating his tastes with a present and fictive collective, Peter seemingly became more certain of his attachments, vocal choices, and what he had to offer a network of musical theater, making taste-making a “meaningful accomplishment” (Hennion, 2010, p. 25) nurturing artistic creation and motivation.

### *Tasting the “sound of gender”*

Even before the course started, our taste-testing expanded from exploring styles and genres to testing what might be described as “gendered sounds.” Ben wrote an email, asking if he had to limit himself to singing songs written for men, wanting to sing “Burn” from *Hamilton*; he felt

that it “suited him” and that he “could do it,” but was unsure of whether he could present the same meanings, feelings, or vocal behavior as a woman; the same “vocal signals” (reflection note). “Genderbending” became a red thread throughout the course and the area where we most actively broke with established vocal conventions. Performing “Chant” from *Hadestown*, we cast two men as the female First and Second Fates, and two female singers joined Alexander Hamilton’s crew, allowing for more girls to rap, not only sing, in the musical.

In the sheet music of the four musicals, ensemble parts were not written as traditionally gendered Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass constellations, but marked Company<sup>8</sup> or groups of “Workers,” for example, thereby not offering excessive information about what kinds of voices should perform what parts. In rehearsing, it became evident that the choice of sound color and idiosyncratic range possibilities blended out a traditional notion of a chorus divided into specific groups of men and women, and additionally rejected the notion that a voice’s sound may identify a body’s gender. The final voicings were decided by negotiation between the pianist present, the students, and me. We did not adhere to a “predetermined” notion of what a group of men and women singing together sounds like, but our decisions were built on concrete circumstances: these voices are available, these are the characters present, this is the chord written in the score, and these are the words spoken. This is a common practice in contemporary musical theater, where vocal arrangements and orchestrations are, at times, delegated to the musical director. Interestingly, our final casting decisions came from bodily responses: goosebumps, shivers, or auditive wellness. It was a physical feeling of “yes, there it is” that made the mark (field notes), underling taste as a corporeal performance (Hennion, 2015), a performance felt.

Actively breaking gender expectations showcased moments of joy when students claimed parts traditionally seen as “off the table.” We ended our course with Katherine spontaneously stating, “I too want to sing King George!” making *Hamilton*’s “You’ll Be Back” the last piece and most-performed song, accompanied by applause and spontaneous backup singing from the others, and highlighting taste’s role as a transformative, engaging, and efficient group-maker (Hennion, 2004, 2015).

## Discussion

This article proclaims that taste is not only part of cultural consumption but cultural production as well. Musicians—here musical theater performers—are also music lovers; for audiences to have a performance to love, performers must have loved first, performing acts of taste and valued vocal behavior. During the 4 weeks, our course not only took form as an explorative event searching for knowledge to convey, but became highly generative, containing acts of doing constituting new realities and new tastes along the way. Analyzing the data through Hennion’s framework, light was shed upon tastes as part of how musicians interact with the world and each other in and through aesthetic processes. Taste-making became a situated, creative, and meaningful activity; what we did and did not do in our tasted performances, in turn, stabilized, built upon, tore down, or challenged traditions, styles, and genres. Consequently, *reappearing* vocal taste patterns became sonic conventions—so-called *vocal demands*—collectively transmitted through repetition and imitation, thereby underlining the strong position of the field’s material mediators such as the original cast recordings. In addition, we shed light on how history, traditions, styles, and genres are written backward (Hennion & Fauquet, 2001) through stabilizing—or subversive—acts in the present, negotiation in the moment, and interaction with previously valued aesthetical choices.

The pluralities of styles, traditions, and genres within musical theater formed our tastes as various attachments with a wide range of objects and circumstances, searching for the “right” piece, the “right” behavior, at the “right” moment, rather than for a catalog of superior works or a singular, stable personal preference. As described by Hennion (2007), taste *depends*, not leading to total relativism but to a wide array of experiences. Our study also illuminated that at this stage in the students’ education, we spent most time figuring out what others do, listening to and imitating those already making it in the business, and consequently stabilizing an attachment to a global network of musical theater. In exploring the “sound of gender,” it also became clear that tastes not only concern musical styles but include questions of who gets to tell which stories and in what manners. This demonstrates how notions such as one’s “own artistic expression” are not innate or “already there” when students begin training, but are an ongoing activity. Furthermore, personal tastes and expressions showed themselves not as the opposite of the collective; we did not seek to escape our social connections, but instead to create satisfactory ways to live with and within them that “felt good” and “felt right.” This made taste-making and taste-testing part of the course’s systematic and formal pedagogies, developed and refined through repetition, corporeal training, trial and error, time, and a variety of methods.

Voice is both a physical and a social matter; the size of our vocal folds and the room of our cavities make certain vocal behaviors and choices possible. At the same time, performed vocal repertoires and vocal choices form our voices’ physiologies, building some behaviors into our “muscle memory” and excluding others. Therefore, in the case of musical theater performers, tastes form vocal behaviors and vocal behaviors form tastes. In our course, performing vocal behaviors meant continuously testing the tastes of ourselves and others, and working on specific vocal techniques became acts of attachment. As singers, we are our instrument (O’Bryan, 2015), and this article illuminates that we are music lovers too, in every sense of the word. In the role of teacher *and* responsible researcher, I cannot argue that my presence and actions did not influence the self-representational utterances and acts performed by the students in the study. But within musical theater, as within all artistic processes, tastes and other artistic choices are constantly negotiated and tested between people of different experiences, rankings, or subject-positionings; taste is an act situated in time and place, and with others, human and non-human.

## **Concluding remarks**

Although research on the development of (vocal) aesthetics within musical theater and musical theater education is sparse—and research on the role of taste among musicians making music is also rare—applying a performative view on taste, as done by Hennion and presented in this article, might be fruitful for future research within these areas. First, it may develop empirical understanding of how styles, genres, and traditions are formed, changed, or stabilized, while also highlighting and scrutinizing the role of performers’ passions and preferences both when working with repertoires of their own choice and those assigned by others. In addition, such research may potentially foreground, and thereby impact, acts of agency enabling musical theater and other performing arts students—and teachers—to see themselves as active members of their profession’s current and future values, traditions, and practices.

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### Notes

1. Hennion commonly uses the word amateur or great amateur to describe the music lover, which, in some English translations is replaced with the word aficionado. In this article, I have chosen to use music lover as suggested by Hennion (2015) in his book *Passion for Music*.
2. Ben Platt performs the original Evan in *Dear Evan Hanson*.
3. Bryce Pinkham constituted the original Monty in a *Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*.
4. Patrick Page is the original Hades in *Hadestown*.
5. "Chant" from *Hadestown*, "You Will be Found" from *Dear Evan Hanson*, "Why Are all the D'squitoes Dying" from *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, and "Alexander Hamilton" from *Hamilton*.
6. Patrick Page is the performer who premiered the role of Hades on Broadway.
7. In Norwegian, he used the word "pondus," which is seen as a combination of authority and impressiveness.
8. In a *Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, the ensemble was divided into some groups not specified by gender, but also some marked "men" and "women."

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## Article 4

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# Musical theatre's omnivorous voice: Interviews with elite voice teachers in the Broadway community

## ABSTRACT

*This article explores how the pluralities of vocal behaviours and vocal aesthetics in present-day musical theatre are understood and manoeuvred in the context of teaching musical theatre voice. Transcribed interviews with six elite voice teachers in the Broadway community are analysed and placed into a conceptual framework of the 'omnivorous voice' (based on sociologist Richard Peterson's writings on cultural omnivorousness and sociologist Antoine Hennion's writings on tastes); the article also engages with Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. Four central themes are generated and discussed: (1) understanding omnivorous code-switching and shape-shifting as a fundamental potential of the voice, (2) manoeuvring vocal omnivorousness by carefully attending to sonic information, (3) searching for authenticity in an omnivorous vocal world and (4) expanding and diversifying vocal aesthetics beyond musical styles and genres. This article contributes to the fields of performing arts pedagogy and voice training in musical theatre, and aims to provide insights into how vocal technique and vocal aesthetics are influenced by, taught in, and created in dialogue with the communities and societies in which our voices exist. The last is especially explored in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## KEYWORDS

vocal omnivorousness  
voice training  
performing arts  
pedagogy  
vocal aesthetics  
COVID-19  
musicals

1. All these named characters do more than one thing vocally. The vocal technical behaviour in all three brackets – legit, belt and mix – can vary widely when it comes to the specifics of the vocal apparatus in question, the range of the parts, the sound colour involved, the vowel being sung and more. See von Germeten (2021).

## THE PLURALITIES OF VOICE IN CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL THEATRE

As a contemporary art form, musical theatre has continuously expanded its repertoire to include a wide variety of popular music (Fisher et al. 2019; Green et al. 2014; Hodge 2020). Arguably, there is a sense of omnivorousness (Peterson 1992) within the field: a broad array of musical taste patterns in the form of absorbed and included musical genres, styles and idioms (von Germeten and Karlsen 2022). When it comes to musical theatre singing, this omnivorousness can cause added pressure, but can also spark creativity, for individual performers who are expected to master an ever-growing number of different vocal styles. As argued by Johnson et al., ‘having multiple voices is not the exception in musical theatre; it is the norm’ (2019: 41). LoVetri et al. echo this sentiment in their subheading, ‘Everybody Needs to Sing Everything’ (2014: 65); they further define this ‘everything’ as a need to master the ‘big three’ of musical theatre singing: ‘legit’, ‘belt’ and ‘mix’ voice. ‘Legit’ singing refers to a vocal quality drawing on classical western, lyrical idioms such as long legato lines, the frequent use of vibrato, a dark sound colour and, in many female parts, the prominent use of so-called head voice, as demonstrated by the Margaret character in *The Light in the Piazza* or the title character in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. ‘Belt’ describes a clear, trumpet-like vocal quality with frequent high-volume, high-intensity notes, and ‘belters’ often perform above what is commonly marked as the so-called chest register, as demonstrated by the Celie character in *The Color Purple* or the Kevin Price character in *The Book of Mormon*. Finally, ‘mix’ describes a vocal quality that tends to rest in between the other two; however, the ‘mixed’ voice commonly leans towards speechlike singing without, for example, the modified vowels commonly involved in legit voice production; contemporary examples include the character of Jenna in *Waitress* or of Orpheus in *Hadestown*.<sup>1</sup> Ben Macpherson (2019) defines the pluralities of voices and vocal aesthetics in musical theatre by identifying four other categories: the ‘rock voice’, which commonly has rawness and grittiness to it, as demonstrated, for example, by the character of Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*; the ‘popperetta voice’, which mixes legit singing with a pop/contemporary commercial sound, as exemplified by Marius’s role in *Les Misérables*; the ‘new Broadway voice’, which commonly blends a bright twang with soul and gospel idioms, as expected of Angelica in *Hamilton*; and the ‘verismo voice’, which relates to performing a so-called realism of sound and often features softer, more intimate volumes, as exhibited by Diana in *Next to Normal*.

As a prerequisite for its departure, this article argues that the vocal demands and aesthetics of today’s musical theatre are even more finely meshed than suggested by the voice categorizations described above. In recent years, the musical *The Band’s Visit* has brought Middle Eastern music to the Broadway stage; *Caroline, or Change* has showcased styles like spirituals, blues, Motown and klezmer; and *Hadestown* has featured a wide variety of folk rock and New Orleans jazz styles. Every single musical style to show up on Broadway brings its particular performance practices, vocal idioms and vocal behaviours into play.

The expectation that musical theatre performers should master vocal versatility is often reflected across the world, not only in singers’ personal audition books but also in musical theatre curricula. Singers are taught to meet standards demonstrated by top Broadway performers like, for example,

Lindsay Mendez, who performed the role of Carrie Pipperidge in her ‘legit’ soprano voice in *Carousel*; showcased her ‘pop’ voice, complete with speech-like sounds and ‘quirky’ vocal breaks, as Rose Fenny in *Dogfight*; and showed off her high, powerful ‘belt’ as Elphaba in *Wicked*.<sup>2</sup> In other words, today’s musical theatre performers – and thus today’s musical theatre students – work towards mastering what, in this article, is referred to as the omnivorous voice. This concept denotes the fact that the human voice inhabits a wide variety of aesthetic possibilities, which all voice training – whether formal, informal, explicit or implicit – can amplify or dampen. The term ‘omnivorous voice’ also highlights the human voice’s ability to shift between plural vocal aesthetics (von Germeten and Karlsen 2022).

Broadway vocalists are quite unique in being encouraged to develop such a large and diverse range of voices. Within the broader fields of vocal and performing arts pedagogy, vocal specialization is still considered the norm, and vocal training is usually separated into specific genre brackets (Kayes 2015). Research on how pluralities of the voice and vocal aesthetics are taught, understood and manoeuvred is thus relatively sparse. So too is research about how vocal technique and aesthetics are influenced by, taught within, or created in dialogue with a community or society in which our voices exist (Harrison and O’Byrne 2014), at least when compared with the recent boom of research into the biomechanical aspects of the voice (see, e.g., Flynn et al. 2018; McGlashan et al. 2016; Aaen et al. 2021).<sup>3</sup> Such a lack of research into vocal aesthetics may result in perceptions of the human voice as singular, unchangeable, or innate in nature – not dynamic, culturally conditioned, or existing within a specific time and space. This article aims to help fill this research gap. Drawing on interviews with six elite voice teachers in the Broadway community, I explore the pluralities of voice in musical theatre, guided by the question, ‘How are vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice understood, manoeuvred and expanded within the frames of teaching musical theatre singing today?’

### THE CONCEPT OF AN OMNIVOROUS VOICE

Omnivorousness is a term that evokes animals feeding voraciously on a wide variety of foods with both plant and meat origins. Within cultural sociology, the term is used to describe contemporary taste patterns; here, the omnivore is defined as a consumer gorging on a plethora of cultural activities (Peterson 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996). In this context, omnivorousness also implies cultural consumers’ willingness to cross over between so-called high and low categorizations of, for example, musical genres. The term reflects a qualitative shift in marking elite status, from univorous refinement and exclusion to omnivorous diversity (Rossman and Peterson 2015). Across time and geographical space, omnivorousness has been applied as a means to understand the changing dynamics of post- or late-modern cultural life (see, e.g., Brisson 2019; Dyndahl et al. 2014; Ollivier 2008; van Eijck 2001). Most recently, scholars have delved into questions of whether omnivorousness is a dynamic within cultural production as well (see, e.g., Luo 2019; Vinge and Stavrum 2022; Wright 2011). For example, von Germeten and Karlsen (2022) claim that within the American musical, omnivorousness is encouraged, brought about and valued not only by audiences but also by producers, composers and performers alike. That omnivorousness ultimately reveals itself as an artistic and embodied practice.

2. See also von Germeten and Karlsen (2022) for an example of vocal omnivorousness as demonstrated by the Broadway star Jessie Mueller.
3. Some musical theatre scholars who are exceptions in this regard are Asare (2020) on the musical theatre industry’s expectations of racialized vocal performance and Johnson’s (2019) on building ‘the Broadway voice’.



‘Vocal omnivorousness’ and ‘the omnivorous voice’ are thereby terms used to conceptualize and express the volume and intensity of vocal aesthetics that result when artists perform the myriad genres and styles employed in contemporary musical theatre. The terms may serve as fruitful metaphors within voice studios and voice studies, and as analytical concepts and frameworks for creative and critical vocal thinkings and doings. The concepts do not imply that the physical side of the vocal apparatus – such as the size of our vocal cords – has no impact on how we sound. Instead, they underline the idea that the voice is a physical *and* social phenomenon. All vocal training aims at altering or modifying various parts of the vocal apparatus – its physiology – to gain a desired vocal output. Vocal technique can thus be seen as divisible into bricks and pieces, which can then be mixed and matched to various aesthetic outputs; vocal practices are defined as physiological behaviours that constantly engage in dialogue with ever-changing cultural valuations, traditions and tastes.

Scrutinizing the voice this way aligns with the work of Eidsheim (2019) in arguing that a voice is not singular but collective, not innate but cultural. A voice’s source is not the singer but the listener. Meizel’s (2020) work on multivocality applies here in focusing on singers in vocal motion, and their transitions and transgressions across genre and gender boundaries, cultural borders, religious contexts and the relationships between the body and technology. Macpherson’s (2019) writings, too, are relevant in that they demonstrate how the plurality of vocal aesthetics found within contemporary musical theatre is formed by audience-driven production values and how the performance aesthetics, in turn, have impacted and challenged audiences. Yet vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice depart from previous research by highlighting the role of taste in artistic processes and, thus, in the formation of vocal styles and behaviours.

In order to more fully understand how musical theatre’s omnivorous taste patterns are understood and manoeuvred, Peterson’s framework must be considered alongside other writings on taste, as in the case of this article, with those of Hennion (2004, 2007, 2015). Hennion outlines taste as an act of attachment, underscores taste’s generative side and defines taste as a performance that ‘acts, engages, transforms and is felt’ (2015: 268). He argues further that taste-making requires skill and the art of sensitizing, and that it is thus a constant ‘making aware of’ instead of an instant ‘yes or no’ (Hennion 2015). Concerning singing, taste is part of what makes us build certain vocal behaviours into our ‘musical memory’ while excluding others; in return, what we are able to do with our voices forms our tastes and values (von Germeten 2022). Vocal omnivorousness may thereby be seen in part as an attachment to the ‘right’ piece, using the ‘right’ vocal behaviour at the ‘right’ moment, thus reflecting the cultural and contextual aspects on which taste depends (ref. Hennion 2007).

Hennion’s views on taste’s reflexive side are also relevant: taste, he argues, is an efficient group-maker. We rely on more experienced peers, critics and guides to test the strength of our valuating acts, but we are also able to identify our own history and external influences, as well as to choose to actively reinforce or surpass them (Hennion 2004, 2007, 2015). Such reflexiveness is, according to Hennion (2004), a foundational act of attention: a suspension or pause where music lovers, performers or voice teachers show themselves as and become agentic, creative, competent taste-makers.

## INTERVIEWING THE ELITE VOICE TEACHERS

Even as musical theatre has become a global art form, the Times Square neighborhood in New York City is most often considered the geographical and artistic pinnacle of the genre, both when it comes to creating new works (Hodge 2020) and when it comes to setting the aesthetic standards and norms of trained musical theatre voices (Johnson 2019; LoVetri et al. 2014). When an artist is training to make it on Broadway or beyond, one-to-one voice lessons are of primary importance as an educational and preparatory tool. Solo voice lessons are not merely offered as an aspect of formal schooling, nor are they a sole means towards helping musical theatre students craft skills for their future careers: ‘in-service’ voice training, too, is often part of a professional’s day-to-day activities, as frequent student testimonials on elite voice teachers’ websites regularly imply.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of this article, the term ‘elite’ is used to describe expert voice teachers who inhabit prestigious, influential positions and are accorded authority and status by their audiences and peers. These teachers are regarded as essential insiders with valuable information to share (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Patton 2015). At the same time, they might be considered potential gatekeepers or, perhaps more relevantly, significant tastekeepers or taste performers within their community. Defining an elite professional is a challenging task: expertise is a highly domain-specific concept (Ericsson 2018). The six elite voice teachers interviewed in this article came recommended by others in the profession based on their perceived status as distinguished professionals in the Broadway community. Each teacher has a long track record of working with many Broadway performers, and all have been described as ‘teachers of teachers’. Their contributions to Broadway, combined with their online presence as teachers of singers across the globe, make their influence potentially worldwide.

As a singer and voice teacher, I have taken solo lessons with two of the teachers and have attended live workshops or online training programmes with all six. While I was researching and writing this article, I approached four more voice teachers. One declined to speak with me for personal reasons; three others did not respond to my requests. The interviews I conducted took place between November 2021 and March 2022. All six ranged from between 30 and 60 minutes in duration. Because of the pandemic, the conversations all took place online. Although I e-mailed six main questions to each voice teacher in advance, the teachers took the lead in structuring each conversation, either by not addressing certain questions in favour of elaborating on others, or by picking an order to discuss the questions due to personal preference. The interviews thus took the form of informal conversations.<sup>5</sup>

All interviews were conducted in English and analysed by engaging with reflexive thematic analysis (hereafter ‘TA’; Braun and Clarke 2019). Reflexive TA emphasizes the importance of the researcher’s subjectivity, and reflexive engagement with theory and data allows interpretation to be considered as an analytic resource (Braun and Clarke 2021). By choosing such a qualitative approach, I acknowledge that what I present is situated, context-bound, and positioned; it is negotiated into being by going back and forth between the transcribed conversations, the conceptual framework, the academic work referenced, the questions asked and my position as a teacher and researcher of musical theatre voice in Norway, far away from Broadway.

4. An example is on Caplan’s homepage: <https://lizcaplan.com/clients> (accessed 9 November 2022). See especially the statement by Nicole Parker, who played Elphaba on Broadway:

Liz Caplan changed my life. Period. She can’t help it, actually. She changes lives on a daily basis. She is a sanctuary from everything that seems difficult or scary in our profession. She is a mentor, a guru, and a healer with a heavy dose of genius.

5. The study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). All interviewees gave written consent to participate and were made aware that I asked for their participation because of their expertise. They were approached as experts during the interviews. No sensitive information was gathered. The voice teachers accepted the anonymity they were offered upon participation.

6. This quote refers to a healthy voice, and builds on an understanding that humans inhabit the same vocal anatomical body parts and are able to manipulate the different parts of their vocal apparatus to create different, desired vocal outcomes. See, e.g., Edgerton (2014).

Four overarching themes were generated from the conversations through the process of engaging with reflexive TA: (1) understanding omnivorous code-switching and shape-shifting as a fundamental potential of the voice, (2) manoeuvring vocal omnivorousness by carefully attending to sonic information, (3) searching for authenticity in an omnivorous vocal world and (4) expanding and diversifying vocal aesthetics beyond musical styles and genres. Theme 1 is predominantly linked to how vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice are being understood, while themes 2 and 3 consider how vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice are being manoeuvred. Theme 4 speaks to how vocal omnivorousness and the omnivorous voice are being expanded within the frames of musical theatre singing today.

***Theme 1: Understanding omnivorous code-switching and shape-shifting as a fundamental potential of the voice***

Because the plurality of music genres and styles within musical theatre is constantly expanding, with new shows premiering while those from previous decades get regularly revived, the ability to master omnivorousness was primarily understood by the six voice teachers as a pivotal way to secure employment for both performers and voice teachers. Becoming a vocal omnivore was not something the voice teachers described as beyond the norm, but was instead compared with a person’s ‘natural’ cultural ability to code-switch or shape-shift their vocal apparatus within various social contexts. As one teacher described it:

It’s like when you are with your pastor, you speak with them in a certain way; when you are with your friends, you speak with them [in a certain way]; if they are of colour, you speak with them in a certain way; your family – a certain way; white people – a certain way.

Each of the voice teachers regarded all sounds humans make to be expressive and relevant to voice training. They also all described the sounds found in musical theatre as not necessarily new. Most of the teachers instead referred to the sounds as having been heard and used throughout (musical theatre) history. The teachers considered the patterns of sound, however, to be somewhat new and widely varied; it was, to the teachers, these patterns that defined a particular vocal style. In this respect, vocal styles were not automatically organized into stable genre brackets or viewed as dichotomies, but were seen more as continuums. A singer’s ability to map, learn, copy and change between vocal functions, registers and sound qualities in order to perform a specific style was further addressed as an innate quality – or fundamental potential – of the human voice. Working with the voice’s entire range of sounds and textures was viewed as simultaneously agnostic to style and as a prerequisite for mastering styles. As one interviewee explained, ‘[s]tudying style is an exercise in mapping [...] the brain has a map of all the body parts, and the more developed this map is, the more you are able to shift different styles’. Another argued that

[i]f you cannot replicate it [a sound you hear], there is a reason; it is probably not that you anatomically can’t [do it] but that there is some kind of neurological thing missing for you to actually hear what that [sound] is.<sup>6</sup>

The teachers further argued that working with the ‘whole voice’ was vital protection against vocal damage; one noted that leaving a ‘portion of the voice untouched’ was ‘a recipe ready for disaster’. Some of the interviewees explained that teachers might choose to train only part of a singer’s voice due to aesthetic bias or a lack of knowledge, for example when resisting teaching belted sounds. One teacher said:

They are saying that they don’t do that because it is not healthy, but in reality, they just don’t understand how to train that particular side of the voice and don’t want to learn. So, they are kind of demonizing this idea, [they are] doing these things because they don’t want to deal with it, or they don’t like it aesthetically.

Such comments touch on a history of power asymmetry between teachers and students, as well as a hegemony of classical singing principles within musical theatre. One interviewee elaborated:

For so many years, we would say, ‘Oh no, your vibrato is too fast, your vibrato is too fast. Slow your vibrato down; you sound like a bird’. And now it’s like, ‘Oh my god, you sound like a bird [screams with excitement]!’ We love it [...]. So, if I hear a fast vibrato right now, I’m like, ‘What kind of bird is that?’ And I get excited about it because it sounds different and cool, and their voice teacher did not take it from them.

The use of a somewhat slow and steady vibrato is generally linked to classical or legit vocal aesthetics, while a smaller and more rapid vibrato is commonly heard in, for example, Arabic folk music or in performances by *chanson* singers like Édith Piaf or contemporary pop singers like Jessie J.

While discussing the ability to vocally code-switch or shape-shift as a fundamental potential of the voice, some of the voice teachers stressed the importance of knowing when to train broadly and when not to. One teacher gave the following example:

Once you get into a show, like [playing] Elphaba or Tina Turner, it is very specific the way you train. I do keep some head tones alive for Elphaba to keep the balance of the larynx, but if I keep her too much in that head tone at the beginning of the warm-up, she is not going to be able to sing the show. And the breathing is completely different for Elphaba; we use a lot more of the ribcage and back of the back body [...]. One of the exercises I use for Elphaba is [sings ‘ayhe, ayhe, ayhe, ayhe’ in a bright, forward-directed, twangy manner] with a kind of high larynx position. And I would never warm up Christine like that, never in a million years.

Elphaba, the protagonist of *Wicked*, is a part especially known for the ways it extends the range and intensity of high, belted sounds in contemporary musical theatre. The titular role in *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, however, demands an array of ‘rockish’ vocal sounds, with a prominent low vocal range and an array of excess vocal effects combined with the demand for resemblance to the voice of the original artist. Christine, the ingénue from *The Phantom of the Opera*, often showcases the high range of a coloratura soprano, with a more speechlike, ‘popish’ voice quality in her lower range. The voice teacher’s comment above additionally spotlights the notion that when a performer does

7. Such a statement aligns with the work of Asare (2020b), who observes that singers often have many voice teachers in their lives – both formal and informal, explicit and implicit – and that voice training and singing are always citational practices. This topic is also explored in von Germeten (2022), who scrutinizes original cast recordings as so-called vocal scripts, and examines these recordings' roles in creating musical theatre performers and performances.

choose to specialize within a specific style, whether for the time being or in general, the omnivorous demands by voice teachers nevertheless stayed the same. As one emphasized, '[w]e teach how you are going to use your voice for whatever you are going to use it for'.

**Theme 2: Manoeuvring vocal omnivorousness by attending to sonic information**

The teachers reported paying careful attention to sonic information when it came to manoeuvring the vocal omnivorousness prevalent in the profession. Most reported that they were constantly engaged in performance analysis by seeing shows, listening to recordings, and studying professional singers. One teacher said:

I have to look at successful people [performing] and get clues from them. Their success leaves clues, and I am watching people who are doing it on a high level for eight to ten years; that is, actually, who I want to observe and make a judgment from, be it rock singing, musical theatre singing, classical singing – it does not matter. I want to watch people who have been doing it for a long enough time that implies that they have good habits, that they are actually able to get up and do it all the time.

On the one hand, performance analysis was considered very important when it comes to the efficiency of learning to sing through mimicry and copying. One teacher noted: 'I had taken no lessons in musical theatre, but I had sung along to every recording, and I sang along to Julie Andrews, and my voice sat itself in that way'.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, carefully paying attention to sonic information was seen by all teachers as arising from a strong loyalty to the first vocal performance of a show. As one teacher elaborated:

The reality is, once a show is a hit, [the producers and casting people] want it sung the way it is on the cast album. And that's all there is to it. It is a formula: it worked, that is what people go in and expect to hear, and that is what they want, so you don't have to do a lot of research outside the actual show itself; you just really have to know what the show is asking for.

Choosing not to bow to the sonic history of a piece or part was thus described as potentially disastrous. For example, performers auditioning for Maria in *The Sound of Music* would not be taken seriously were they to sing with a dark sound colour or belt instead of switching into head voice on the high notes of 'The Hills Are Alive'. One teacher even stated that if someone is auditioning for the role and breaking with its audible expectations, 'not only would the person not get hired, but they would be laughed at'.

Any radical change in vocal aesthetics, this same voice teacher observed, would only be possible if the singer cast in the show was a star, as in the case of Carrie Underwood performing the role of Maria on the live TV version of *The Sound of Music*. Sutton Foster's recent turn in the Broadway revival of *The Music Man* applies here as well. In Foster's case, the producers changed the keys of songs and the show's overall style in order to play on her strengths as an excellent tap dancer and belter, rather than to attempt

to have her adapt to the more traditional high-soprano sonic heritage of the part.

Such strong loyalty to the performance history of a part caused the teachers to address the performers they worked with by the parts they currently inhabited or were training for, as in: 'I teach Christine, I have many of the Christines on Broadway. And I've got the Elphabas. And I've got the Tina Turners', or 'I did that with my Evan the other day'. At the same time, some of the voice teachers also critiqued the practice of prepping for a role only by listening to the cast album or to past productions in order to gain vocal information. One teacher argued that this way of working trains 'cookie-cutters', not artists. Another claimed that limited listening teaches singers to focus too much on moving the plot forward while 'neglect[ing] the music itself'. This voice teacher instead offered the following advice:

If you [a performer or voice teacher] want to be very smart about it, I would study one style at a time in the order of which happened so that you can hear how music evolved, [...] how society changed music and music changed society. So, to me, it is really [about] listening, but not to a song and copying someone [...]. [Instead,] listening to the palate of singers from a certain time period allows you to grow a wide palate as a singer with a lot of colours.

This constant gathering of and attention to sonic information turns teaching musical theatre voice into lifelong 'on-the-job' training; this is what was described by the teachers as keeping them on top of their game. As one interviewee put it, 'as long as you work with people who are on the Broadway stage at the current moment in time, that is what keeps you up to date'.

The ability to use sonic information presented by singers in training was described as essential in this regard. Most teachers emphasized that expanding voices from a place where the performers already 'blossom' and experience vocal freedom is decisive in an omnivorous vocal world. One teacher said:

I have a weird memory of what people sing [...], so I will go, 'Ok, you [the performer] sang this song, that is pretty much what that person [the part in question] is doing, so go back and sing that again'. And they do it, and they go, 'Ok, I feel it', and then [I say], 'Put that into the new thing you are doing', and that is often very successful because it is [like] a shortcut in the brain, because it is using myelin, which is the isolator around nerve pathways: 'It is already a myelinated pathway, it is not brand new' [...]. I am going to use something this person already knows to get themselves [to master new vocal demands] as quickly as possible.

As this quote illustrates, some of the teachers advocated the use of principles from neuroscience-informed voice training,<sup>8</sup> as well as motor learning,<sup>9</sup> as highly efficient ways to work. This is especially the case when the teachers are working with Broadway singers whose schedules are tight and whose new songs, styles, or parts are expected to be learned in a matter of days.

### ***Theme 3: Searching for authenticity in an omnivorous vocal world***

All the voice teachers stressed that whilst attempting to master a wide variety of vocal styles, contemporary musical theatre performers should know

8. Neuroscience deals with the structure or function of the nervous system and brain. The field has been applied to singing and to the voice by Byrne (2020).
9. Motor learning refers to processes occurring in the brain in response to the practice of a certain/new/expert skill, which results in changes to the central nervous system. For more on motor learning and singing, see Holding (2020, 2022).

also where their 'voice[s] uniquely shine so that they can bring something interesting into the room'. This was explicitly related to processes of developing new musical theatre work, but focusing on what was named a singer's 'authenticity' also seemed to help make order out of what was often perceived as unlimited external vocal demands imposed by the profession. Notions of both stylistic and personal authenticity were thereby allowed to exist side by side. One interviewee said:

You don't want all the singers to sound the same because they make all the same things happen. Instead, you tell them, this is the sound I need. Now, figure out a way to do it. 'Cause then, they sound like themselves; they sound unique [...]. So, training needs to be based on knowledge of what kind of sounds one expects to find in certain styles, and there are very distinct patterns. But then, if you look at the individual singer and looked inside their throats, you could have three or four different ways to have a bright mix [...]. Somebody might change their soft palate; somebody else might constrict their throat a little bit. Somebody else might lift the tongue more. But out here in the world, we still hear the same sound. And that allows for functional freedom. But also, individuality and uniqueness.

Personal authenticity was thus linked to that which is considered 'anatomically centred' for a singer and to how a singer's physical structures may draw limitations for specific vocal outputs. In other words, authenticity was described as the place 'where your voice really wants to go'. However, all teachers also agreed that such a vocal centre is highly influenced by what one has been singing; over time and with the right vocal tools, the vocal center can thus be regarded as movable. One of the interviewees elaborated on such mobility:

Say you [the performer] have been a professional swimmer, and we [voice teachers] say, well get over here, you now need to run, and you go, 'just because I know how to swim does not mean I know how to run', but then we go, 'yes, but you are strong, you do have muscles, and you know how to use your body, so come over here and let me show you how to run. You know how to be in your body in another way. Let me show you how to be in this way'.

The teachers thereby addressed authenticity as a constructed quality and as a process, as well: something to develop, train and make blossom with voice lessons – not something a singer is born with or within. One teacher said:

To me, [good] taste is synonymous with the singers being with their authenticity. Like, my taste does not have to do with a certain way to produce sound; it has to do with singers aligning with themselves [...] when I hear, like, the world's [most] famous popstar at the moment, Billie Eilish, that goes like this [sings in an exaggerated soft manner, with audible air on the sound]. That is so stylized; I freaking love it. That's her thing. Nobody else sounds like her [...]. When I hear a voice and it [sounds] generic to me, I know there is something that can be developed to make them more authentically themselves. For me, that is what good taste is. It is about developing the singer to be the most authentic self.

These comments further spotlight the role of taste in making singers attach to and build muscle memory of specific vocal behaviour in voice training. Finally, the comments exemplify how working towards a highly equipped and varied vocal toolbox is pivotal for a singer not only to blend into today's musical theatre profession but also to stand out in an omnivorous vocal world.

#### **Theme 4: Expanding and diversifying vocal aesthetics beyond styles and genres**

On 12 March 2020, Broadway shut down for what would turn out to be eighteen months. All the voice teachers repeatedly described a sense of 'being ahead' in their vocal community. With regard to the pandemic, they emphasized that they had all been teaching online for years, which meant that the pandemic did not hit their personal businesses that hard. Nevertheless, the pandemic resulted in the need for just about everyone in the Broadway community to work online. In this respect, the pandemic helped shed light on online training as a way to secure a more balanced work–life relationship. Online classes, too, allowed for a more financially sustainable way of working, especially in expensive cities (and commercial theatre centres) like New York. While the pandemic was difficult in many ways, some of the teachers nevertheless suggested that being on Zoom was, in some respects, a happy artistic accident. During the past few years, a trend of making or remaking successful stage shows as films has re-emerged, with new film studio releases of *In the Heights*, *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* and *West Side Story*. Arguably, the pandemic allowed teachers and performers the chance to work steadily within the format of performing live on camera. This training was additionally identified as challenging, expansive and transformative for the vocal aesthetics of the profession. One teacher noted:

I think it is nice because we [performers] are told to be so big and out, and now, it is in[wards] and cool, and present, and right here, and delicious [...]. So, again, it is this idea of this sort of subtle, nuanced, finessed human beings, speak[ing], singing on camera that creates a very different quality of sound and performance than what we do in an audition room or on stage.

Beyond being able to address the resurgence in popularity of film musicals, online vocal training was also viewed as a new means of securing accessibility in training, auditioning and performing musical theatre. Access for singers with some disabilities expanded as a result of online options, especially when it came to auditioning; as one teacher noted, 'in the city, there is only one audition space that was accessible; everyone else had stairs'. Even further, auditions became newly possible for artists residing outside of New York City. Many of the interviewees suggested that for them, one of the silver linings of the pandemic included a broader student pool, and thus – for the profession as a whole – the opportunity to find and work with more talent. As a result, many casting agents were made newly aware of their responsibilities for creating equity and diversity when it came to the voices they heard and the performers they employed. As one of the teachers argued, '[y]ou [casting agents] cannot say "I did not see any Black people; there were not any around". No, they came from all over the world. You cannot say that again'.<sup>10</sup>

10. The pandemic worked to shift access and power in the US theatre industry. As argued by one of the interviewed teachers:

I think that now, people know they can work from home or anywhere. Some might have moved home to the Midwest and realized that they enjoy being with their family, but that doesn't mean that they are not top-notch professionals. I wonder if we are going to experience more top-level regional theatre that is equally amazing as Broadway. If tourists are not going to fly to New York any time soon as they used to, and the prices [are really high], it's like, I think the current model isn't sustainable. But that doesn't mean that people are not going to want to sing, and sing in epic ways.



11. See, for example, O'Bryan and Harrison's (2022) conference paper, 'More men named David than people of color: Diverse voices in musical education and training'.
12. The book *So You Want to Sing Musical Theatre* by Amanda Flynn has a chapter on gender-neutral voice training, and argues that 'while sound itself has no gender, sound in society has been gendered' (2022: 174).
13. Traces of this newfound admiration may be observed in the viral video of Hugh Jackman praising Sutton Foster's understudy or at venues like New York's 54 Below, which presented a concert titled 'The Four Alternative Wives of Henry the Sixth'.

In the United States, the pandemic coincided with other crises, including the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent rise in intensity and urgency of the Black Lives Matter movement. The teachers repeatedly described Broadway as a community that was not very diverse,<sup>11</sup> but said that these recent events helped open up increased 'colour-consciousness' in casting processes. At the very least, casting is no longer limited to traditional race categorizations. Hiring an Asian Evan or a Black Glinda was seen by some of the teachers as a way of bringing new ways of being, and new patterns of sound, to the musical theatre stage – a newfound norm catalysed, as well, by the pre-pandemic success of the musical *Hamilton*. By the same token, recent events worked to encourage the teachers to think about their roles as leading figures in the community. When asked 'What if anything about the voice do you wish you knew earlier?', one interviewee answered:

I wish I had understood how backward America is regarding race. I grew up in absolutely privileged circumstances. And I know that. And I know that white supremacy – without being aware of it [then] – I know now that that was the culture I grew up in. And I had how many Black friends, how many Black friends do [white] Americans have? That is the question to ask.

The teachers also noted an increased focus on diversity when it comes to vocal behaviours, vocal aesthetics, gender and gender expression:

We are also having a huge gender conversation [...]. It is an exciting world because we realized we thought there were men and women, and now we know this non-binary concept will affect the way we teach and the sounds that we hear. I love the fact that I can think of it in terms of [...] the size of the larynx. So, if there is a large larynx that is not going to get smaller in time [...], if that person is gender-identified as female, I can work to help them stretch the vocal folds and that upper range [is] going to lift the speaking voice, and I do all of those things [...]. It is huge.

By introducing the idea of gender-neutral voice training, this teacher argues that vocal technique should be tailored to the size of the individual's vocal apparatus and aimed at specific, desired auditory outcomes, instead of an 'old model' in which many voice teachers resorted to standardized ideas of how categories of gender should sound.<sup>12</sup> Now, singing across registers, vocal functions and voice qualities are increasingly described as expected aspects of all musical theatre performers. Contemporary casting practices suggested by the most recent *Company* revival, the casting of both a female Hermes and a male Fate in drag in *Hadestown*, an all-female version of *1776*, and a transgender Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors* can be seen as examples of diversifying the vocal aesthetics of musical theatre even more. Accordingly, the teachers felt that one of the most significant developments in contemporary musical theatre voice was the pitch constantly moving up in the repertoire. Moreover, voices are no longer organized in gendered or stable soprano, alto, tenor and bass brackets.

The teachers also expressed their newfound admiration for the musical theatre ensemble as the pandemic shed light on the vital work of flexible, highly competent understudies and swings in times of crisis.<sup>13</sup> In musical

theatre, ensemble members are typically cast to blend in with a show's overall vocal style while also being able to replicate a part's signature sounds when they serve as understudies. They also need to stand out when playing smaller individual roles, which are often organized through multiple casting. The many swings who are hired to cover four or more different vocal parts within the same show are also often cast due to their omnivorous qualities. Thus, post- (or at least late in the) pandemic, being and becoming a (vocal) omnivore has been praised as a means of standing out among the competition.

One teacher discussed the new appreciation for understudies thusly:

I wonder if the stillness [of the pandemic] is going to bring a new way of creativity to the table. I don't know; it was physically disastrous for the [musical theatre] business, but it makes people rethink – look, for example, how understudies are being treated now, all of a sudden; they are the heroes because of COVID-19. People reassess ego and why we do things and, like, is it always, always important to be the lead? Or are we actually doing this for art?

### **THE MANY PATHS FORWARD IN MUSICAL THEATRE VOICE**

The long trajectory of omnivorous research within cultural sociology has shown that the omnivore does not comprise only one type of person. There are, instead, many ways to understand and manoeuvre, legitimize and produce omnivorous taste patterns (Ollivier 2008). Correspondingly, gorging on a wide variety of musical genres and vocal aesthetics was understood by the six elite voice teachers in various ways: to secure employability in a highly commercial musical theatre profession, to assist vocal sustainability for highly pressured musical theatre performers, to enable a sense of authenticity or uniqueness in an omnivorous vocal world, and to work towards diversity and equity in an ever-changing commercial theatre scene.

Thus, this article diverges from previous writings on omnivorousness by illuminating that within musical theatre, it is not solely the enormous and growing variety of musical genres and vocal styles that have had a significant impact on the wide variety of sounds heard, used and taught. Musical theatre's broad vocal aesthetics have become increasingly diversified as well by elements like the increase of race – or 'colour-conscious' casting practices, the idea of 'gender-neutral' voice teaching and the appearance of new performance formats. In other words, all of these elements have worked to make musical theatre's omnivorous voice even more omnivorous.

Previous omnivorous research has demonstrated that no one can become genuinely omnivorous, gorging on absolutely everything at the same time. There are always processes of inclusion and exclusion, power dynamics, cultural issues or other kinds of influences or elements at play (Bennett et al. 2008; Warde et al. 2007). Where such borders are drawn within musical theatre is beyond the scope of this article, and might be scrutinized through future research on voice, vocal practices and vocal pedagogies.

This article has considered some ways that social dynamics and cultural shifts can take root during periods of seeming stasis. The stillness and dysfunction of the pandemic resulted in shifts in the ways the voice is approached by educators and taught to Broadway performers. As Hennion has argued (2004), sometimes pausing – even if only for a fraction of a

second – can enable the act of attachment and result in new opportunities that either reinforce existing values and practices, or buck history and push against tradition in order to create new ways of being. Eidsheim speaks of the pause as a way to

indicate anything from a sense of expansion of the mental, intellectual and emotional space to nonautomatic reflections about meaning. In short, the pause is not about listening for a greater degree of accuracy but about attending from a state that can help interrupt the way we usually listen.

(2019: 182)

A whole profession that was, in many respects, pausing for a full eighteen months was thereby able to embrace the notion of radical change, both as it related to larger practices involving broader working conditions and to micro-aesthetic shifts in vocal practices. Such changes would perhaps not have been possible if omnivorous aptitudes were not already so incorporated into the profession itself. Musical theatre is, by its very nature, a broad, hybrid and fragmented interdisciplinary art form drawing from acting, dancing, singing and playing music; it is both commercial and art; it sets out to entertain but can also be the subject of critical thinking. Thinking in pluralities is hardly new within the Broadway community. Still, it remains to be seen whether these shifts and changes – the silver linings of the pandemic – will remain, or whether the profession will revert to old habits once the smoke has settled and the pandemic is behind us.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the six voice teachers for their generous participation. She also wants to thank her colleagues at the Norwegian Academy of Music, especially Professor Sidsel Karlsen, Professor Sigrid Røyseng and Ph.D. research fellow Vera M. W. Due; Associate Professor David Fielder at Kristiania University College; the two anonymous peer reviewers and *Studies in Musical Theatre's* editors Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth Wollman for their constructive comments and views on this article in progress.

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### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Guro von Germeten is a research fellow at the Norwegian Academy of Music, Centre for Educational Research in Music. She is writing her Ph.D. thesis on the pluralities of vocal behaviours, vocal aesthetics and vocal tastes within contemporary musical theatre. She is a singer and an authorized complete vocal technique teacher, and holds a master's degree in cultural management from the Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, Vienna. Von Germeten is teaching musical theatre voice at, amongst other places, Kristiania University College (in their Bachelor's in Musical Theatre programme) in Oslo. Her recent academic work contains writings on 'vocal omnivorousness' and 'the omnivorous voice', the role of original cast recordings in forming contemporary musical theatre performers and performances, and the role of taste within artistic processes.

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Guro von Germeten has asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

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## Appendices

- Appendix 1: NSD approval
- Appendix 2: Information letter and consent form, students at Kristiania University College
- Appendix 3: Information letter and consent form, Broadway voice teachers
- Appendix 4: Questions, students' reflection notes
- Appendix 5: Interview guide, Broadway voice teachers
- Appendix 6: Co-author statement





## **Appendix 1:**

### **NSD approval**

## NSD approval

15.05.2023, 19:31

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

[Meldeskjema](#) / [The omnivorous voice - a study of vocal demands and vocal behavio...](#) / Vurdering

## Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

**Referansenummer**  
567353**Vurderingstype**  
Standard**Dato**  
26.06.2020**Prosjekttittel**

The omnivorous voice - a study of vocal demands and vocal behaviors in contemporary American Musical Theatre

**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**

Norges musikkhøgskole / CERM - Senter for utdanningsforskning i musikk

**Prosjektansvarlig**

Guro von Germeten

**Prosjektperiode**

01.09.2020 - 01.12.2023

**Kategorier personopplysninger**

Alminnelige

**Lovlig grunnlag**

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.12.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#)**Kommentar**

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 26.06.2020 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

**MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER**

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

[https://hnsd.no/personvernombud/meld\\_prosjekt/meld\\_endringer.html](https://hnsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html)

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

**TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET**

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 01.12.2023.

**LOVLIG GRUNNLAG**

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

**PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER**

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelige angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lenger enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

<https://meldeskjema.sikt.no/Seb0937d-7767-4ef3-9026-7a87205abde0/vurdering>

1/2

## Appendix 1

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15.05.2023, 19:31

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

### DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

### FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Zoom er databehandler i prosjektet. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp underveis (hvert annet år) og ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene pågår i tråd med den behandlingen som er dokumentert.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Henrik Netland Svensen

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)



## **Appendix 2:**

**Information letter and consent form,  
students at Kristiania University College**

## **“The Omnivorous Voice: a study of vocal demands and vocal behaviours in contemporary American musical theatre”**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore the complexity, variety and rapid change of vocal practise found in contemporary musical theatre singing. This letter contains information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

### **Purpose of the project**

The goal of this project is to map, understand and generate new knowledge on the present-day complexity, and development of vocal demands and vocal behaviors found in contemporary American musical theatre repertoire. Musical theatre is a rapidly changing field; expanding and including a wide range of popular musical styles and sub-genres, drawing upon whatever musical style needed to suit its purpose, variety and change is left as the current norm. This study focuses on the link between the environment, culture and society in which vocal and musical meaning, preference and performance exist, and the bearing these influences have on the applied sound qualities of the voice and the techniques used to develop them. The project is a Ph.D. study by Guro von Germeten at the Norwegian Academy of Music. The first part of its empirical data collection is set in New York, focusing on elite voice teachers working within the Broadway community. The second part is set in an action research-inspired collaborative student-teacher environment in higher musical theatre education in Norway, exploring how these demands and behaviors are being played out in a “local” domain of musical theatre.

### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

The Norwegian Academy of music is the institution responsible for the project. Part of the empirical study is done in collaboration with the Norwegian College of Musical Theatre/ Kristiania University College.

### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

You are being asked to participate in the study because of your attendance in the course “Aktuelt Emne” at The Norwegian College of Musical Theatre, spring 2021.

### **What does participation involve for you?**

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you attend the scheduled dates for the course (TBA) during the weeks 2-8 in the spring of 2021. The course will contain vocal exploration of the following works: A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder, Hamilton, Dear Evan Hanson and Hadestown. You will be expected to hand in a written reflection note to as part of the course. This will be used as the main data gathered in the survey. Our work sessions will also be recorded electronically, and I will take notes during the process.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Only me and my supervisors at The Norwegian Academy of Music will have access to the personal data. To ensure that no unauthorized persons are able to access the personal data, I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data. I will store the data on a research server, locked away and protected with access codes.

In the study's publications, I will give all participants pseudonyms, and I will anonymize personal data as far as possible. However, given that the Kristiania University College is the only of their kind in Norway I cannot guarantee that you will be indirectly unidentifiable.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end 1.12.2023. At the end of the research project all data will be anonymized and recordings deleted.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with The Norwegian Academy of Music, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- The Norwegian Academy of Music via Guro von Germeten at [guro.v.germeten@nmh.no](mailto:guro.v.germeten@nmh.no) or supervisor Professor Sidsel Karlsen at [sidsel.karlsen@nmh.no](mailto:sidsel.karlsen@nmh.no)
- Our Data Protection Officer: Rolf Haavik at [rolf.haavik@habberstad.no](mailto:rolf.haavik@habberstad.no)
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,  
Project Leader



Guro von Germeten

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## **Consent form**

I have received and understood information about the project [insert project title] and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in the course Aktuelt Emne spring 2021.
- for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I can be recognised given that the name The Norwegian College of Musical Theatre can appear in the study's publications

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 01.12.2023

---

(Signed by participant, date)



## **Appendix 3:**

**Information letter and consent  
form, Broadway voice teachers**

## **“The Omnivorous Voice: a study of vocal demands and vocal behaviours in contemporary American musical theatre”**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore the complexity, variety and rapid change and expansion of the vocal practise found in musical theatre singing. This letter contains information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

### **Purpose of the project**

The goal of this project is to map, understand and generate new knowledge on the present-day complexity, and development of vocal demands and vocal behaviors found in contemporary American musical theatre repertoire. Musical theatre is a rapidly changing field; expanding and including a wide range of popular musical styles and sub-genres, drawing upon whatever musical style needed to suit its purpose, variety and change is left as the current norm. This study focuses on the link between the environment, culture and society in which vocal and musical meaning, preference and performance exist, and the bearing these influences have on the applied sound qualities of the voice and the techniques used to develop them. The project is a Ph.D. study by Guro von Germeten at the Norwegian Academy of Music. The first part of the empirical data collection is set as in New York, focusing on elite voice teachers working within the Broadway community. The second part is set in an action research-inspired collaborative student-teacher environment in higher musical theatre education in Norway, exploring how these demands and behaviors are being played out in a “local” domain of musical theatre.

### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

The Norwegian Academy of music is the institution responsible for the project. Part of the empirical study is done in collaboration with the Norwegian College of Musical Theatre/ Kristiania University College.

### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

You are being asked to participate because of your significant role as a vocal teacher/voice coach in the Broadway community. The sampling is done by reputation, and your visibility as a voice teacher, also abroad in the field of musical theatre.

### **What does participation involve for you?**

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you attend an interview with Guro von Germeten. The interview will take approx. 1–1.5 hours, preferable conducted in person, but the interview may also be by done Zoom or another preferable medium. The survey includes questions about the vocal training you offer at your studio/university, your views on the vocal demands found in contemporary musical theatre repertoire, your thoughts and values about cross training of the voice, tools used in learning new music and new styles of musical theatre, the relationship between absorbed musical theatre styles and original genres, amongst others. Your answers will be recorded electronically, and I will take note during our conversation.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

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- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with The Norwegian Academy of Music, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- The Norwegian Academy of Music via Guro von Germeten at [guro.v.germeten@nmh.no](mailto:guro.v.germeten@nmh.no) or supervisor professor Sidsel Karlsen at [sidsel.karlsen@nmh.no](mailto:sidsel.karlsen@nmh.no)
- Our Data Protection Officer: [insert name of the data protection officer at the institution responsible for the project]
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: ([personvernjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personvernjenester@nsd.no)) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,  
Project Leader



Guro von Germeten

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## Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “The Omnivorous Voice: a study of vocal demands and behaviours in contemporary American musical theatre”, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in an interview with Guro von Germeten
- for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I can be indirectly recognised because of my position in the field of Broadway theatre

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx.  
01.12.2023

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(Signed by participant, date)

## **Appendix 4:**

**Questions, students' reflection notes**

## Questions, students' reflection notes

1. How do you understand the phenomenon of vocal omnivorousness and the way it is manifested and works within today's musical theatre profession?
2. How do you experience and understand, in and through your body, the vocal demands and the vocal behaviors of the repertoire you have been working with?
3. How would you describe your learning experience or learning outcome of the project?
4. This project has been a part of an external research project; how has this affected your learning experiences or learning outcomes?

## **Appendix 5:**

### **Interview guide, Broadway voice teachers**

## Interview guide, Broadway voice teachers

1. In my ongoing doctoral thesis, I contemplate contemporary musical theatre as a rapidly changing art form, absorbing and including a wide variety of musical genres and styles to its repertoire, and where the idea of cross-training the vocal apparatus and an expectation to master multistylishness vocally, is repeatedly voiced. Seen from your stance as a voice teacher in the profession, how do you view this?
2. What do you regard as excellence in teaching musical theatre voice?
3. How do you personally work to stay current and apt in your profession as a voice teacher? And what drives you in this work?
4. Genres, musical styles, and vocal traditions are often perceived as fixed entities to be re-produced/cited in musical theatre performances. What part do you see your personal (vocal/musical) taste play in your teaching?
5. Arguably, the pandemic and the closing of Broadway (and beyond) came with a silver lining in the form of time to contemplate the genre and the industry. How do you relate to this as a voice teacher?
6. Some might argue there exists an audible American sonic stamp, a so-called “Broadway sound”, is implemented in contemporary musical theatre, regardless of the style performed or location of performance; how do you view this?



## **Appendix 6:**

### **Co-author statement**

## Co-author statement



Norges  
musikkhøgskole  
Norwegian Academy  
of Music

### Medforfattererklæring / Co-author statement

Ref §10-2 i ph.d.-forskriften / *Section 10-2 in the PhD regulations* (in Norwegian only)

«I avhandlinger hvor det inngår arbeider med flere forfattere eller samarbeidspartnere, skal det følge en underskrevet erklæring som beskriver kandidatens innsats i hvert enkelt arbeid.»

Kandidat/*Candidate*: Guro von Germeten

Tittel på avhandlingen/*Title of the dissertation*

The omnivorous voice: Exploring the pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics and vocal tastes in contemporary (American) musical theatre.

Denne erklæringen gjelder følgende artikkel

*This statement refers to the following article*

Voicing omnivorousness, assembling the omnivorous voice: The American musical explored.

Medforfatter/*Co-author* Sidsel Karlsen

Kort beskrivelse av prosess og arbeidsdeling

*Short description of the process and contributions from the authors*

We hereby state that the article described above has come to be through a collaborative process: Both authors have contributed to the conception and design of the work; the acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of the data/theory used in the work; the drafting of the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; the final approval of the version to be published. Still, even though the authors are conjunctly accountable for the accuracy or integrity of the article, von Germeten acknowledges that she stands solely responsible for the article's role within her PhD's evaluation process and results.

Dato/*Date*: 25th May 2023

Kandidatens signatur/*Candidate's signature*

Guro von Germeten

Jeg samtykker med dette til at artikkelen kan benyttes i avhandlingen

*I hereby agree that the article may be used in the dissertation.*

Medforfatters signatur/*Co-author's signature*

Sidsel Karlsen



Musical theatre is a rapidly changing art form integrating and absorbing a wide range of musical genres and styles to its repertoire. As a result, the art form's vocal-musical styles are in constant flux, and the criteria for aesthetic valuation or vocal behaviors are nebulous and ever-changing. In recent decades, research into the voice's physical side has increased our understanding of how the voice works. The relationship between voice and the environment, culture, and society in which voice and vocal music exist remains less well explored. This thesis therefore aims to expand our knowledge of what is termed the human voice's social side, by exploring the pluralities of vocal behaviors, vocal aesthetics, and vocal tastes within musical theatre.

*The omnivorous voice* is written from the stance of being a teacher of musical theatre voice within higher education and is situated within the larger umbrella of practitioner research. It contributes to the scholarly fields of music education, cultural sociology, musicology, and voice studies. First, it contributes by bringing an underexplored research field—musical theatre voice—to its forefront. Second, it contributes by highlighting how tastes make up a part of cultural production and artistic processes. Third, it contributes to the performative or practice turn within the arts and social sciences by focusing on performance practices in writing musical theatre history. Furthermore, the thesis offers the concept and framework of the omnivorous voice, manifesting the volume, intensity, and intricacy of the vocal behaviors and vocal aesthetics that are involved, for example, when performing contemporary musical theatre voice.

Guro von Germeten (b. 1980) is a singer, songwriter, music researcher, and voice teacher, specializing in cross-over training of the voice and voice for stage.

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