REVIEWING COMMERCIAL MUSIC RESOURCES: A GUIDE
FOR ASPIRING SINGERS AND VOCAL PROFESSIONALS

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Contemporary commercial music is a broad label used to describe the styles of popular music including pop, rock, rhythm and blues, jazz, hip-hop, country and heavy metal. The vocal ability required for each of these genres varies greatly but may require the use of screaming, belting, utilizing vocal fry and growling or singing with a breathy or dark tone. Singers who wish to perform in these genres may need assistance with vocal technique to assure the longevity and the quality of their singing. Due to the rise in popularity and the accessibility of contemporary commercial music (CCM), commercial pedagogical guides and self-study manuals are abundantly available for purchase. Aspiring singers are searching for appropriate training for this genre without having an awareness of how the voice works and how to maintain good vocal hygiene. Those who seek out private instruction are often frustrated when traditional classical training techniques are offered, rather than techniques utilizing CCM styles. Because CCM pedagogy is relatively new and few pedagogues in this specialized field are well known, the self-taught singer is responsible for finding a reliable study source. Many vocal instructors and choral directors are interested in familiarizing themselves with new stylistic techniques to enhance the performance of their students while maintaining vocal health. By reviewing popular vocal method books and techniques, insight may be given to assist a singer or vocal teacher in selecting resources of CCM styles.
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By

Susan Christina Hanlon
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth Riggs and Speech-Level Singing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Kain: Scream,Belt and Ultra Low Singing Technique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Rose: A Scientific Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Love and Pop Star Technique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Peckham: Contemporary Vocal Styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Peckham and Advanced Technique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claytoven Richardson and a Studio Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dena Murray and Stylistic Differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. COMPARISON OF KEY CONCEPTS</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vocal Mechanism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Tone and Onsets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microphone Technique, Stage Presence and The Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Vocal Techniques and Styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Health and Hygiene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDNOTES</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES


Anne Peckham, Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer. Anne Peckham. (Boston: Berklee Press, 2006)

1. Oh, Had I Jubal’s Lyre by G.F. Handel ................................................................. 3
2. Ain’t No Other Man by C. Aguilera ................................................................. 4
3. Riggs Squeaky Door Exercise ............................................................................. 5
4. Kain Range of The Rock Voice ........................................................................ 12
5. Kain Range of The Classical Voice .................................................................. 12
6. Kain Crying and Screaming ............................................................................. 13
7. Kain Glam Rock Exercise .................................................................................. 14
8. Peckham Eliminating Overuse of the Tongue .................................................. 19
9. Peckham Minor Pentatonic Patterns .................................................................. 20
10. Peckham Jazz Scoop Exercise ......................................................................... 21
11. Riggs Descending Arpeggio ............................................................................. 37
12. Murray Sliding Across Bridges ...................................................................... 37
13. Richardson Patterns for Studio Microphones .................................................. 41
14. Kain Ultra Low Notes .................................................................................... 45
15. Peckham Gospel Swing ................................................................................... 46
16. Peckham Pentatonic Pattern .......................................................................... 46
17. Kain Bringing the Chest Voice Up .................................................................. 49
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In 1841 Manuel Garcia II, considered by many to be “the father of modern voice science,” introduced the first volume of his *Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*.\(^1\) This treatise provided insight into the preferred teaching methods of Garcia, as well as his physical observations of the vocal mechanism.\(^2\) Following the lead of Manuel Garcia, late 19\(^{th}\) century teachers like Mathilde Marchesi and 20\(^{th}\) century teachers like William Vennard and Richard Miller published vocal methods for performers and singing instructors. Today, literature covering classical *bel canto* style teaching is abundant and is utilized in many private vocal studios and academic institutions. These techniques provide a solid foundation for vocal performance, primarily focusing on preparing the voice to handle the demands of classical vocal repertoire and operatic arias.

With the variety of popular musical styles increasing, performers and teachers must be knowledgeable about contemporary commercial music (CCM) in addition to traditional vocal literature. CCM is a broad label used to describe styles of music including pop, hip hop, gospel, jazz, rock, country, punk, musical theater and heavy metal. The success of singers in these contemporary idioms has raised public interest in vocal training and commercial music study, which has increased a demand for instructional media that is applicable to these rock and pop styles.

Many concepts of vocal technique apply to both commercial and classical singing. Rachel Lebon, contemporary voice pedagogue, emphasized these similarities in her book *The Versatile Vocalist*: “For singing to be healthy and to project effectively, in both performance idioms and venues, vocal production must emanate from the
breath and away from the throat, be resonant with clear enunciation, and remain free from extraneous tensions in the body."³ Seth Riggs, American Idol vocal coach, agreed, “It doesn’t matter whether you sing pop, rock, opera or musical theater. You should sing with a technique that allows you to just relax and concentrate on performing.”⁴ Contemporary vocal coach James R. Wiggington supported this idea by comparing traditional bel canto methods and commercial singing, “the fundamentals are similar: establish balanced airflow and vocal fold adduction, stabilize the larynx, and maximize resonance potential.”⁵ The basic principles of vocal production seem to be universal regardless of style or genre. However, the vocal demands vary greatly between bel canto and CCM singing. While a solid understanding of basic technique applies to all styles of music, it is clear that there are many differences in the tone production, diction, vibrato and phrasing when comparing commercial styles and traditional classical styles of singing. Extreme vocal styles, including screaming and belting, are not typically addressed in traditional teaching guides. A vocalist’s ability to perform with stylistically appropriate tone, ornamentation and enunciation are the necessary elements of an authentic performance.

Just as traditional vocal methods train flexibility in the voice in order to sing a long melismatic passage in a Handel composition, contemporary methods address the melismatic passages found in a Christina Aguilera recording. In both instances the voice must be supported with a steady stream of air and be able to move freely through melodic patterns very quickly. The differences between a Handel passage and a Christina Aguilera passage are primarily stylistic. While the vocal tone in traditional classical singing must be clear and light with precision on every note, the pop melisma
requires a guttural tone with scoops and slides between sections of the passage.

Figures 1 and 2 display the notated melismatic passages from Handel’s “Oh, Had I Jubal’s Lyre” and Christina Aguilera’s “Ain’t No Other Man.” Based solely on notation, the examples appear quite similar: many notes on one syllable. In observing a performance of each piece, the stylistic elements clearly identify the two genres. In Handel’s passage the performer must execute the phrase without effort and with accuracy. In the beginning figure of “Ain’t No Other Man,” the entire phrase is established with a pitched slide and followed with a disregard for rhythmic timing. Each section of the phrase is attacked with a slightly different tone and a belt-like quality is maintained throughout the passage.

Figure 1. “Oh Had I Jubal’s Lyre” by G.F. Handel
Each genre has a characteristic vocal timbre or tone differentiating one from the other. The use of vocal fry, growling and breathiness are accepted and expected in many of the commercial music styles that are prevalent today. “The country/pop singer may use a breathy or ‘rough’ type of voice while an opera or classically trained singer will strive for a very specific balance of tonality.” James Wigginton supported this expectation by addressing tonal preference in commercial styles: “suddenly ‘pure’ is not always appropriate, ‘pretty’ is not always effective, and ‘proper’…is dead wrong.” A buzzing raspy sound that would be inappropriate and cause for concern in oratorio work may add validity to an artist who sings rhythm and blues or rock and roll. Although the issue of glottal onset is discussed in many of the traditional pedagogical resources, the healthy production of vocal fry and the ability to retain a buzz throughout the voice is a concept that appears more frequently in commercial literature.

In Figure 3 from *Singing for the Stars*, Seth Riggs offers an exercise to build the ‘edge’ or ‘cry’ in the voice in order to connect the registers and allow a chest register quality throughout the singers’ range. By imitating a squeaking door and remaining in chest register, the vocal folds maintain adduction and allow a smooth transition between registers.
In the current rock scene, singing with an edge is sometimes not enough to please the audience and performers must frequently yell or even scream for extended lengths of time. Male singers like Avenged Sevenfold and female screamers like Flyleaf are required to perform multiple shows each time they tour. If they cannot scream without losing their voice they will not be able to sustain their career. Just as there is a correct way to sing, there are correct ways to scream without causing pathologies to occur in the vocal folds. Increasing diaphragmatic support while dropping the jaw and allowing the tongue to get out of the way will ease a singer into the ability to scream. In *The Complete Vocal Workout* by Roger Kain, screaming is the primary topic discussed. Kain emphasized the importance of the diaphragm and the ability to “constipate”: to allow the pressure on the throat to dissipate. By taking the singer out of his or her normal range, he introduced the concept of creating ugly sounds in a chest voice register.

Aspiring artists are searching for appropriate training for this genre, often with no awareness of how the voice works and how to maintain good vocal hygiene. Those who seek out private lessons are frustrated when traditional classical training techniques are offered, rather than techniques utilizing CCM styles. “As long as teachers of singing look for one kind of vocal behavior or one type of production, an impasse concerning contemporary commercial styles of singing will continue to exist.”\(^{11}\) Jeannette Lovetri,
director of the Voice Workshop at Shenandoah University, elaborated on the need for commercial instruction by using the rock musical *RENT* as an example of the challenges a singer may encounter that may not addressed by traditional vocal instructors, “If [a singer] works with a classical teacher, she usually has to figure out on her own what works and what does not in singing the show’s rock music eight times a week.”¹²

Many issues arise when a singer confines their study to classical vocal teachers and choral directors. Aside from a possible lack of stylistic understanding, the vernacular used in classical study varies greatly from commercial study. Seth Riggs supported this point, “The language of voice teachers and choir directors abounds in such confusing and dangerous clichés. Every day, singers who never question the wisdom of their teachers manipulate and strain their voices until the day they discover their voices are ‘burned out’.”¹³

Because the CCM style is relatively new and few pedagogues in this specialized field are well known, the self-taught singer is responsible for finding a reliable study source. This study will serve as a guide of selected resources for the development of a CCM performer or teacher.
CHAPTER 2
INTRODUCTION TO RESOURCES

Based on the abundance of existing resources as well as the constant introduction of new methodologies into the public market, it would be impossible to include an overview and analytical study of all of them. The sources included in this paper were selected based on accessibility in local bookstores and music conferences, and recommendations by experts in the commercial vocal field. Each review includes biographical information about the author, a broad outline of the material discussed, the intended audience based on terminology and diagrams, and the type of media included in each resource. The materials studied can be divided into two categories: instructional vocal pedagogy collections that allow the singer to develop physical vocal improvement and informative how-to guides, which direct an aspiring commercial singer towards aspects of the business. While all of these methods address commercial styles of music, some include very specific methods of screaming, belting, singing with electronic amplification and aural development for jazz and pop.

Seth Riggs and Speech-Level Singing

Seth Riggs, vocal coach and entrepreneur, began singing professionally at the young age of 9 in the Washington National Cathedral as a boy-soprano. Through the years that followed, he studied acting and voice with such notable teachers as Sandy Meisner and Tito Schipa. Seth performed on Broadway for three years and was a guest artist with the New York City Opera for six seasons. As he continued his career, he discovered that his forte was in teaching rather than performing, and he embarked on a
teaching career that has brought him great success. His clients are typically high profile singers and actors who seek guidance in building their vocal stamina, range and tension free technique. Some of his most well known clients include Stevie Wonder, Bernadette Peters, Shirley MacLaine and Michael Jackson.\(^\text{14}\)

After studying the *bel canto* style of singing, Seth Riggs designed a comprehensive vocal method including specific exercises and terminologies called speech level singing (SLS). His book, *Singing for the Stars*\(^\text{15}\), offers basic vocal technique concepts like breath support, vocal cord vibrations and resonance as well as advanced concepts of speech level singing, including connection through register breaks. The goal of SLS technique is to “sing with the same comfortable, easily produced voice you use, or should use, when you speak. No matter if you sing high or low, loud or soft, nothing feels different in your throat or mouth.”\(^\text{16}\) Riggs warned that the SLS concept does not mean that a performer should sing like they speak, but instead should maintain a “speech level posture” to assure that muscular tension is not intensified upon sustaining pitch.\(^\text{17}\) The exercises in this book encouraged maintaining a stable larynx rather than forcing it down on low notes or allowing it to jump up in the throat on higher pitches. Through vowel modification and incorporating a “cry” into each vocal warm-up, the singer should improve their mixed voice and ability to transition between registers.

It is recommended by the author that *Singing for the Stars* may be used by all vocal levels and for private study if the reader does not have access to a vocal instructor. Riggs urged readers to adhere to the cautions of vocal strain and overuse, which are frequently mentioned on the CD as well as highlighted inside the book. He
also stated that each example must be correctly performed before moving on to the latter lessons in order to assure that the technique is implemented in a safe and effective way.

Another available resource by Seth Riggs is *American Idol Singer’s Advantage* which is a seven CD program utilizing the speech level singing method. It includes a workbook and introductory DVD guiding the listener to determine their level of ability and devise a plan to improve. This 30-day program is available in either a male or female version that introduces the basics of SLS.

Day 1 in the female version begins by selecting from four available songs: “My Funny Valentine,” “Crazy,” “Hero” and “Amazing Grace.” After choosing a song, the reader records a performance against the karaoke track that is included in the program. Riggs stresses, “it is important to only sing the song one time” and reminds the reader that saving this first recording is imperative in order to track personal progress. The voice evaluation CD included, leads the singer through various warm-ups and scales by demonstrating the correct way to sing them and then asking that the student record themselves and listen back to detect differences. Following self-evaluation, the lesson offers demonstrations of typical vocal issues and helps lead the singer to determine which areas are the weakest in their singing. Once these issues are determined, the singer may identify which lesson plan they need to follow in order to improve. The first exercise on the voice evaluation CD is a five-note scale on the syllable “Ah” beginning on C4 and continuing until C5. The five-note scale should sound even in volume and tone and should not sound like two distinct voices when singing through the passagios or the breaks in the voice. Included in this package is a workbook containing space for
the singer to document days 2 through 6. On day seven, the evaluation process occurs again using a second CD, and practice should continue through day 30. Seth Riggs frequently mentions his “five secrets to mastering any song,” based on the idea of incorporating the warm-ups from the program into each song until the performance is satisfactory.

*American Idol Singer’s Advantage* uses fairly general language and refrains from complicated technical concepts. Because the language is not scientific in nature, the intended audience appears to include the beginning singer. If the singer recorded their performances and reviewed each excerpt according to the demonstration tracks, the knowledge of vocal technique would not be necessary as long as the listener was able to hear tone and registration differences. According to Riggs, the singer should be able to improve tone, intonation and style after completing the 30-day program.

**Roger Kain: Scream, Belt and Ultra Low Singing Technique**

While books like *Singing for The Stars* teach concepts that may be applied to multiple commercial vocal styles, *The Complete Vocal Workout: A Step-By-Step Guide To Tough Vocals* by Roger Kain assists with handling the more extreme rock styles like death metal and glam rock. Roger Kain is a classically trained singer who hails from the United Kingdom and he enjoyed a performance career that included opera and theater roles as well as doing lead vocals in various rock bands. He has worked with Mark Wynter, Lulu and Frank Ifield and acted as head of the voice department at the Brighton Institute of Modern Music from 2002 to 2004. *The Complete Vocal Workout* is an instructional book that includes a two CD set. The CDs demonstrate each of the
vocal exercises from the book in both the male and female voice, followed by an accompaniment track for listeners to try the passages on their own. Kain states that his intent in writing this book was to “dispel some of the myths and fears of rock singing” and to offer teachers a guide to healthy vocal production in the rock and pop idioms.²²

Roger Kain prefaces the lessons by illustrating vocal range and stressing the necessity for using the full range of the voice. Figure 4 displays his concept of vocal range in the rock voice. In reference to Figure 4, he writes that his diagram, The Range of The Rock Voice, “isn’t a misprint; many modern rock singers really can cover that range.” The range he speaks of is labeled for the male and female voices and split by chest, mixed voice and head voice or falsetto registrations. The female range, according to the author, begins at C2 and continues until Eb7. The male range was shown to begin as low as C1 for death metal and continue up until F#6 in screaming voice.²³ Kain compares this extreme range with his definition of a well-developed classical range in Figure 5. The female range begins with chest register C3 and continues to E4 and leads into mixed voice E4 through F5 and carries head voice or falsetto placement for F5 through F6.²⁴
The Complete Vocal Workout begins by emphasizing the importance of "opening up the voice" with an attempt to reach higher notes in the register while producing a strong sound. While reminding the reader to let the tongue touch the bottom teeth, Kain introduces exercises instructing women to begin with chest register before allowing
their register changes and telling men to avoid using their falsetto voice. One of the
lessons to assist in this concept uses a crying sound similar to a baby’s cry. Singing
with this whiney sound should encourage a firm onset of each phrase to keep the singer
from having audible breaks from higher to lower pitches.

Figure 6. Crying and screaming by Roger Kain.

The underlying theme throughout the book is diaphragmatic control. The idea of
constipating or "push[ing] out through your bottom" while singing from the diaphragm is
emphasized in multiple chapters. After the singer feels the diaphragmatic movement
while panting, they are told to apply this movement into quick moving scale patterns and
arpeggios. Readers are repeatedly instructed to "move the diaphragm violently to
motivate [fast] notes," and to "slam the diaphragm in hard at the start of every [slow]
note." The use of such colorful language could potentially be confusing to beginning
singers, therefore it seems that the intended audience would be an experienced singer
or teacher who is already familiar with basic vocal techniques.

The Complete Vocal Workout focuses on using both diaphragmatic and
emotional power behind the voice throughout the book. Exercises are separated by
registration and explored the mixed voice and chest voice abilities before introducing
stylistic tools. The mixed voice was covered extensively and incorporated the use of
“spoilt-brat sounds” and the “male glam-rock scream mix,” shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Glam rock exercise by Roger Kain.

In Appendix A of his book, Roger Kain constructs a 30-lesson classroom plan for teachers to incorporate in their private studios and schools. This plan follows the chapter order of his book but offers applicable songs for male and female students to listen to and sing. Kain explains that his lesson plans were “designed to coincide with the academic school year, although it should be understood that reaching the standard required for modern commercial singing takes more than a single year.”

Bob Rose: A Scientific Approach

Teaching commercial voice from a more scientific perspective, Contemporary Singing Techniques by Bob Rose offers diagrams to illustrate all muscle and laryngeal movement. Bob Rose is a vocal instructor and performer who has worked with The Beach Boys, the cast of Sister Act, members of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus and instructed master classes for the Grammy in the Schools program. Rose approaches the instruction of singing by first introducing the four areas of vocal production: the power source, the vibrators, the articulators and the resonators. By providing diagrams of the basic laryngeal mechanism and the oral articulators, the
author offers a visual guide with which readers should familiarize themselves. In the CD introduction, Rose defines the purpose of his vocal technique by explaining, “the basis of this vocal technique is to take years of frustration and finding out what doesn’t work out of the equation.”

Drawings portray frontal and side views of chest expansion and collapse along with diaphragmatic movement displays and stabilized laryngeal positioning. By walking the reader through a yawn, a low laryngeal speaking exercise and a panting example, Rose prepares the vocalist to handle staccato and sustained speaking in a tension-free fashion. The concept of raising the soft palate was explained by referring to the feeling of a partial yawn.

A partial yawn will drop the larynx down, opening up the throat for release and depth of resonance in exercises and singing. Also, activating these throat muscles, stabilizing the larynx, keep it from moving up into the breathing passage in the upper throat when singing higher notes.

Once this important concept is understood by readers and executed correctly, the singing examples should be implemented into the practice routine. Rose introduces “the car starting” exercise based on the idea of incorporating diaphragmatic vibrato in order to alleviate tension in the throat when singing. He describes this as “the sound of an old car trying to start but not actually starting” or a “pant with a sustained pulse of sound.” By using an arpeggio leading into the diaphragmatic vibrato, Rose encourages the stomach and diaphragm muscles to engage throughout the entire exercise in an attempt to teach support.

Rose offers guidelines to enable the reader to use the CD and book in the most productive way. The listening is divided by gender to help the singer to easily identify with the audio examples. After observing the sample tracks, the listener may turn the balance on their stereo to the right or the left to adjust the volume level of the singers on
the CD. It is recommended that the reader practice the exercise in the book until they are ready to move to segment two of the method. Segment two consisted of live recordings of vocal students that were given real-time instruction with background music similar to karaoke tracks. As the book continues to the trouble-shooting segments, Rose discusses the problems with each vocal student and offers written advice to alleviate them. After listening to the critique sessions, singers may perform to the background tracks on their own in order to incorporate the techniques discussed in earlier chapters.

The vernacular in this guide speaks to an audience that is already aware of the fundamentals of singing, but seeking further instruction in the ability to sing popular idioms.

Roger Love and Pop Star Technique

Successful voice coach Roger Love recently published a concise guide to popular singing entitled “Sing Like The Stars!” Roger Love has coached a wide array of performers, including the Beach Boys, Def Leppard, Hanson, Mandy Moore and Eminem. He begins this book by explaining that his goal is “to make you the best you can be, and to make it easy for you to achieve that goal.” The book was contains ten chapters briefly discussing concepts like breathing, register changes, vibrato and artistic style.

Accompanied by the audio CD, readers start with basic breathing concepts. After a short description of diaphragmatic breathing, Love cautions against the frequent problem of holding breath in. He explained, “When you try to sing, especially when you go to hit a high note, you’re tightening your stomach and holding your breath.” The act
of holding your breath increases tension, making it more difficult to sing. While many other resources offer options for breathing, *Sing Like the Stars* insists on the use of breathing through the nose rather than the mouth. Roger Love explains that nasal breathing is imperative because it allows the air to filter before meeting the vocal folds. He continues to emphasize the importance of keeping the vocal folds lubricated, both by staying hydrated and by avoiding mouth breathing.

The main idea discussed in this book is the idea of using a *middle voice*. By incorporating the middle voice into singing, vocalists may produce a smooth transition between a low chest voice and a high head voice. In addition to creating uniformity throughout the range, middle voice can create a stronger, edgier tone on notes that fall in the head register range. Roger Love shares his “One-Octave Goog” exercise, which calls for the singer to arpeggiate a major chord using the word “goog.” Using a voiced consonant to begin each passage encourages the singer to achieve adduction and use a middle voice rather than a falsetto sound. Love reminds the singer to resist the urge to increase volume as the exercises reach into the upper range by using the analogy of a zipper:

> It’s so much better if you just keep the same volume when you’re trying to sing the higher notes. That way the cords don’t lock, and the ‘zipper’ is free to move without getting stuck in one position.37

Because the chapters are short and explain the concepts of vocal pedagogy without the use of technical terms, *Sing Like the Stars* seems an appropriate resource for an aspiring singer without years of training. The bulk of the text discusses the importance of healthy vocal production and of avoiding habits that may impede healthy voice use. The CD includes audio examples of Roger Love demonstrating both the
problematic sounds that singers frequently use as well as the ideal vocal sounds that a singer should strive for when performing commercial music styles.

Anne Peckham: Contemporary Vocal Styles

Anne Peckham, one of the most frequently mentioned commercial voice teachers, has taught pop and jazz voice at Berklee College of Music since 1987. In her book, The Contemporary Singer\textsuperscript{38}, Peckham introduces some basic vocal techniques to singers who want to focus on pop, rock, country, gospel, and musical theater styles. The first chapter explains the importance of developing healthy vocal habits in every genre of singing. By recognizing some of the rampant myths that may discourage rock and pop singers to study voice, Peckham reassures the reader that “lessons won’t make you lose your unique sound.”\textsuperscript{39}

“Many vocal problems originate with these two problems: lack of sufficient breath support, and/or excessive muscular tension.”\textsuperscript{40} These two ideas are the underlying theme of The Contemporary Singer. Exercises to maintain a steady air stream were introduced before adding notes and tone to the lessons. Diction plays a strong role in this resource and Peckham explains to the singer that vowel modification is necessary and that keeping lyric delivery true to the spoken vernacular is quite important in commercial vocal styles.

In Figure 8, Peckham addresses an important issue that many singers face with articulating a light “L” by bringing the tip of the tongue to touch the teeth. By eliminating the extraneous jaw movement and overuse of the tongue, singers may increase the clarity and accuracy of their singing.
Figure 8. Exercise to eliminate overuse of the tongue by Anne Peckham.

The Contemporary Singer eases readers into the styles required of pop, gospel and other genres by beginning with folk song examples such as “The Water is Wide” and “Scarborough Fair” before advancing to more challenging ideas. As the book progresses, pentatonic melisma patterns are introduced to engage the singer in stylistic elements that prepare them for the repertoire that follows. Peckham organizes the exercises in order of difficulty, gradually requiring an increase in flexibility and an improvement in tonal accuracy.

Anne Peckham gives readers a play-by-play description of how to utilize practice time in the most efficient manner. From describing the ideal practice environment to detailed stretches and vocal exercises, Peckham offers detailed assistance for readers to implement with their use at home. After the singer progresses through basic vocal technique-based lessons, The Contemporary Singer offers many different two-measure patterns incorporating pop melisma passages which move up or down in half-steps to cover vocal range. Figure 9 illustrates one of these melismatic exercises based on the pentatonic pattern.
In addition to technique and style, *The Contemporary Singer* includes an introduction to microphone technique and suggestions for purchasing a microphone and cable. Peckham also discusses ways to combat performance anxiety and what methods of calming nerves should be avoided, such as alcohol usage. This book and compact disc set end with three popular songs to practice ballad, jazz and pop styles.

**Anne Peckham and Advanced Technique**

In Anne Peckham’s book, *Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer*, she offers a more advanced vocal guide to commercial music styles including advanced melisms, pentatonic patterns and other specific style exercises. This guide includes tips on breathing and posture as well as a vocal health chapter for readers who need a reminder of basic vocal technique. The accompanying CD may be used in conjunction with the book in order to guide the singer through a full vocal workout. It includes a beginning vocal workout consisting of slide exercises, lip trill arpeggios and octave slides in which the singer needs to keep their air stream steady and their notes in tune against chords with colorful extensions. Most of these slide examples required the “oo” and “ee” vowels in order to give some insight into vowel modification for beginning singers of Commercial Music. In Figure 10, Peckham combines the concept of scooping
with the swing feel in an effort to teach singers to make a connection between jazz styles and the necessity to “scoop”. Peckham sings this passage on the audio example and includes additional elements of style such as vibrato and relaxing the diction, but only instructs the singer to scoop. By demonstrating these tracks at performance level, Peckham enables her listeners to emulate the style and begin to acquire commercial elements by singing along with the CD.

Figure 10. Jazz Scoop Exercise by Anne Peckham.

Most of the beginning workout examples utilize standard vocal warm-ups, such as five note patterns and minor scales on one syllable. Peckham sets this resource apart through the assortment of musical styles placed underneath these typical warm-ups. All of the audio tracks are accompanied by a full band in rock, gospel, jazz, country and pop styles and they include a lead singer for the duration of each exercise.

The advanced workout incorporates long passages of complex rhythms and notes to encourage vocal agility and build a connected range throughout the registers. Rock passages require syncopation, scoops and slides between pitches and used
syllables that began with “H” and “D” to discourage the singer from over-pronouncing the lyrics in rock styles. Latin passages involve percussive syllables and sustained tones and jazz examples are set in a jazz waltz with lyrics and large melodic jumps to improve intonation and phrasing. In addition to the solo voice material, *Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer* offers two and three part harmony exercises. Individual lines are notated and demonstrated on separate tracks and then combined to require the singer to hold their own part against the other harmonies. The harmonies are primarily triadic and, through repetition, could show the singer how to improvise harmonies on their own repertoire.

Claytoven Richardson and a Studio Approach

*The Professional Studio Vocalist,* by session singer and producer Claytoven Richardson, is a teaching tool for singers who aspire to record and work in the commercial music business. This guide offers readers a behind-the-scenes look into studio singing and working as a recording artist. Richardson organizes his book into chapters that mirror the process a vocalist undergoes while developing a studio career. Beginning with a “general knowledge quiz,” the book helps the reader to recognize terms and information considered to be common knowledge by producers and studio engineers. Chapters include guidance for self-promotion, networking tips for getting studio work and a general description of labor unions. While *The Professional Studio Vocalist* addresses technique issues like tuning and vibrato, the majority of this book covers the importance of knowing the business side of commercial singing. Simple explanations of microphone technique and tuning practice are offered in addition to tips
to maintain good vocal health.Professionalism is stressed in this book and is broken down into several categories to demonstrate the importance of building a strong reputation. Richardson clarifies the importance of maintaining impeccable intonation in the recording studio despite the frequent use of auto-tuning software. Auto-tuning capabilities increase the ability for an engineer to perfect the recording, however it cannot “yet generate all of the subtle nuances of a singer’s voice.” While The Professional Studio Vocalist does not offer exercises to improve the vocal production of an aspiring singer, it may be used in conjunction with other vocal resources to teach commercial music concepts.

Dena Murray and Stylistic Differences

Advanced Vocal Techniques, by Dena Murray and Tita Hutchison, focuses on the importance of the middle voice in commercial musical styles. Dena Murray is a singer and educator who served as the head of the vocal technique department of the Musicians Institute in Hollywood California from 1995 to 2006. She maintains a private studio in California where she coaches advanced singers and voice-over talent. Tita Hutchison is a vocalist in the Los Angeles area who has enjoyed performing with such legends as Herbie Hancock and Waylon Jennings in addition to her frequent appearances in voice-over ads, television productions and films. These two ladies combined their knowledge and experience to create a guide for bridging the chest and head registers of the voice in order to achieve a solid performance. The book begins by defining vocal range and related terminology. Murray’s technique encourages the educator to introduce head placement and chest register separately in order to build an
effective bridge between registers. To achieve a continuous tone throughout the range, the singer is instructed to sing into the “mask” and feel sensations such as buzzing and vibrating in the cheeks, which are described in the book. The authors frequently caution the singer against feeling strain at any time. Murray reminds the reader, “if you feel strain at any time, it means that you are squeezing or pushing and probably stuck in your throat.” While the authors acknowledge the difficulty in maintaining a relaxed sensation through break areas of the register, they explain that keeping a concentrated focus on the airflow will help to achieve successful bridging. This guide includes an accompanying CD with the exercises shown in the Appendix of the book. The CD also includes examples of stylistic elements in jazz, country, rhythm and blues and pop singing. Each listening example has a companion guide listing the specifics of the genre. The language in Advanced Vocal Techniques is uncomplicated in most sections, which makes it accessible to a broad audience of aspiring singers.

All of the above resources are readily available to the public and contain information to improve the quality and ease of popular commercial singing. By comparing their key concepts, singers may be guided to select which resources are most helpful to their individual needs.
CHAPTER 3
COMPARISON OF KEY CONCEPTS

The Vocal Mechanism

Singers rely on their voices daily and an awareness of the voice is essential for vocal health and longevity. Though their careers and livelihood are based upon the use of their voice, many commercial singers are unaware of the specifics of the vocal mechanism. A basic knowledge of vocal function should be a part of training for all aspiring singers. Rose defends the need to understand the vocal mechanism to all singers interested in improving their performance by telling them to “imagine playing an invisible piano, guitar, violin, saxophone.” By giving the analogy of an invisible instrument, readers may understand the need to have a basic understanding of the laryngeal anatomy to know how to properly ‘play’ it. Introduction to vocal anatomy and the vocal process appeared in many of these sources.

Rose defines the vocal mechanism in four parts:

1. Power source (diaphragm/abs and intercostals/lungs/trachea/bronchia)
2. The Vibrators (vocal cords/larynx)
3. The Articulators (teeth/lips/gum ridge/hard palate/soft palate/uvula)
4. The Resonators (nasal/oral/throat…and sometimes chest and sinuses)

He includes an illustration of the mouth and labels all of the oral articulators to help readers work with the exercises in the book.
Anne Peckham uses similar terminology in *The Contemporary Singer* to introduce the four parts of the voice:

1. Generator (breath)
2. Vibrator (sound production - larynx)
3. Tone enhancer (resonance - vocal tract)
4. Articulators (words - tongue, jaw, teeth, lips, etc)

She includes a detailed explanation of the vibrator process:

> The vocal cords are situated in the larynx and comprised of the arytenoid cartilages, the vocalis muscle (thyroarytenoid), ligaments, and membranes. Activated by the brain with the thought of speaking or singing, nerves control the muscles that close the arytenoids cartilages, bringing the vocal cords together. This closure offers a resistance to airflow, which results in a ‘buzz tone,’ the fundamental tone of vocal production.46

To demonstrate the action involved in the buzzing of the vocal cords, Peckham instructs singers to bubble their lips by blowing a thin stream of air between them. The buzzing created between the lips replicates the movement between vocal folds during phonation.

After listing the parts in the larynx, Seth Riggs illustrates the front view of vocal cord motion. He explains that the air pressure builds up under the closed cords until the cords must blow apart to release the air. This release creates the sound waves that are expressed in our voices. Once the sound waves are released, the cords return to their closed position. Riggs also introduces the concepts of breath support and vocal cord adjustment. In order to study speech-level singing, a vocalist must learn how the voice works and how to control the voice through sensation.

Dena Murray includes a detailed account of the thyroid and arytenoid muscle groups in her book. She explains that the cords stretched from front to back rather than side-to-side and that a muscular adjustment would be necessary with each pitch.
Murray illustrates a sliding scale to monitor muscular adjustment. As the pitch goes higher, the arytenoids stretch more. Included in this section is a warning to readers to avoid the overuse of air to push the voice up to higher pitches. By utilizing the muscles to reduce open space and increase closure, vocal damage from too much air may be avoided.

Despite the importance of being familiar with the vocal mechanism, some sources avoid dealing with specific information. *The Complete Vocal Workout* by Roger Kain and *The Professional Studio Vocalist* by Claytoven Richardson do not discuss vocal function or illustrate the laryngeal makeup. Though Richardson does not address this aspect of singing, Kain’s book does include definitions of the larynx, glottis, and other terminology in the glossary. By covering this information in the back of the book, rather than the text, it appears that the importance of understanding the vocal mechanism is not a priority for all commercial singing guides.

**Breathing**

The importance of comfortable diaphragmatic breathing is a concept that transcends the boundaries between bel canto and commercial vocal technique. As Peckham points out, “Breath management is one of the most important practices you will learn in vocal study. It affects your intonation, tone quality, sustaining power, range, dynamics, expression, flexibility, phrasing, and stylistic interpretation.” Each resource for commercial voice mentioned here covers the technique of breathing without tension and sustaining support. The differences between methods may be seen in the exercises geared to improve breath control and support in singers.
Peckham includes a section in *Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer* acknowledging the importance of a relaxed neutral posture in maintaining good breathing and support. She instructs readers to adhere to a stretching routine with each vocal warm-up session. By stretching and warming the entire body, muscles relax and the body opens to receive air. Peckham addresses the common issue of poor posture among pop or rock singers: “Since contemporary music can be strenuous to voices, it is especially these singers who need good posture to reduce tension and increase breath capacity… If you do not actively involve your body in breath support, you will be more likely to strain or injure your vocal cords.”

In the following excerpt from *The Contemporary Singer*, Peckham offers advice to allow the body to use full abdominal breathing by releasing the abdominal muscles:

1. Stand with your feet about 18 inches away from a table (or the back of a chair).
2. Lean with your hands on the edge, as if you were looking at something on the table.
3. Take a slow, deep breath, letting your belly feel as if it will fall toward the floor. Don’t hold your abdominal muscles in, but rather allow them to drop, assisted by gravity.
4. Exhale, with firm abdominal muscles.
5. Inhale again, feeling the expansion in your back muscles and the release of your abdominal muscles toward the floor.
6. Try singing a few easy passages of a song, letting your abdominal muscles drop toward the floor when you inhale between phrases.
7. Stand upright and try to get the same released feeling in your abdominal muscles when you inhale.

By releasing the abdominal muscles, the singer may inhale a full breath as they would if sleeping or resting without holding tension in the body.

Seth Riggs breaks down the breathing process in three steps: signal, action and result. During inhalation the brain will send a signal that the body needs oxygen, which
will lead to the action of the diaphragm dropping and the rib cage expanding. The result is the intake of oxygen followed by the exhalation process. While *Singing for the Stars* does not include drills solely designed for breathing practice, an understanding of correct breathing and support is required to perform subsequent examples.

Bob Rose separates the act of singing into four components focusing on the breathing process:

1. Diaphragmatic breathing is accomplished
   a) by expanding the chest and
   b) letting air in and out through the stomach by lowering and raising the diaphragm.

2. Breath Control is the firming and the interaction of the abdominal and the diaphragm muscles to adjust the air stream to match the opening of the vocal cords.

3. Placement is where the air stream and sound goes.

4. Release is the untrapping of the air stream from impedances and resistance.  

Placing an emphasis on diaphragmatic breathing, Rose recommends panting like a dog with the pulsation of air. He demonstrates on the accompanying CD how to perform this panting exercise and invites the listener to join him in the warm-up. Rose reminds the listener to lower the larynx slightly with the use of a ‘partial yawn’ in order to create space in the throat. By placing one hand on the upper stomach, movement of the diaphragm may be monitored. After the singer successfully completes this panting exercise, they are instructed to apply the same diaphragm motion to sustain a spoken pitch. Combining the use of sustained tone with the use of the diaphragm assists singers in improving their breath control and support.  

Keeping consistent with the emphasis on diaphragmatic breathing, Kain introduces correct breathing to his readers by comparing lung expansion to a full
balloon. When the balloon is filled with air it expands, and as the air is expelled, the balloon is deflated. Kain instructs readers to perform a breathing exercise in a seated position with feet on the floor. With one hand gently on the throat and the other hand on the stomach, the singer should breathe out and “expel all the air by pulling the diaphragm in as far as you can.” The singer should then “breathe in, puffing up the lower part of your stomach like a balloon, so that it pushes your hand out.”<sup>52</sup> Singers must let the air inhalation inflate the stomach and not simply flex their abdominals in order to perform this exercise correctly.

As a singer learns to breathe effectively and gains control over breath support, they may still experience a choking sensation at times, leading to the feeling of being out of breath. This sensation is generally referred to as grabbing or holding the breath. Riggs stresses that “exhalation begins as soon as inhalation has taken place,”<sup>53</sup> and emphasizes the need to keep the breath moving cyclically without holding or tensing in between inhalation and exhalation. Similarly, Murray offers, “To prevent grabbing, don’t take in so much air that you ‘fill up the tank.’ Otherwise, you’ll end up losing most of it fairly quickly, because the cords can’t control the flow if there is too much air sitting underneath them.”<sup>54</sup> She explains the ideal process for breathing during phonation:

> Once you’ve drawn [breath] in, it should immediately shoot back out (like a boomerang) from that spot (the back of your throat inside your mouth) as sound is added at the exact same moment you’ve drawn the air in: at the tail end of that drawn-in breath. It has to be done as if the whole event is one simultaneous action- no starting, holding the breath (stopping it), and then starting to sing.<sup>55</sup>

If a singer is able to free the breath, the muscles will release tension and the tone and control will improve. The extreme ranges and tones required in commercial music rely on solid breath support. Though each method incorporates different ideas to improve
support, it is clear that aspiring singers need to successfully execute the breathing exercises before continuing their study of vocal tone or style.

Vocal Tone and Onsets

The timbre or tone of a voice is the distinguishing characteristic between singers, making certain voices or musical styles recognizable. Though a clear and tension-free tone is the goal of traditional bel canto technique, commercial music may require a breathy or gritty tone to emphasize emotion or lyrics. Because commercial musical styles call for some unpleasant sounds and stylistic ideas, improper voice use could take place if a singer is untrained. In her article, *Artistic Vocal Styles and Techniques*, pedagogue Sharon Radinoff acknowledged the dangers of using stylistic tools like growling effects and singing with a gritty tone. She stated, “It is possible to create a desired vocal tool…the key to longevity of career is finding, and understanding the ‘systems balance’ and alignment for singing before creating stylistm.”

A breathy tone requires a slight opening of the cords during phonation to allow extra air to pass through. A gritty tone should originate in the buzz of the vocal cords while maintaining solid breath support. This buzz occurs in the natural speaking voice, but frequently is lost in the singing voice. Speech-Level Singing Technique utilized this buzz in the voice to monitor cord closure and the process of maintaining a low laryngeal position during a performance. This idea of maintaining a speech-like quality during singing is a popular concept among many teachers of commercial singing. Sergius Kagen, New York composer and voice teacher, includes a lengthy commentary about the importance of speech in the singing voice in his book *On Studying Singing*: 
To sacrifice the normal speaking resonance in search of some hypothetical perfect singing resonance which produces tone as opposed to speech instead of in conjunction with speech is perhaps one of the most self-contradictory practices, for every student tries to be expressive without realizing that much of his practicing may be directed at incapacitating his most valuable tool of expression, his normal speech.\textsuperscript{58}

Many aspiring singers complain that they have a breathy tone or perhaps they sound ‘shouty’ and don’t feel comfortable singing lightly. Achieving a firm closure of the cords at the onset may minimize breathiness in the voice.

When a singer initiates a tone, it is referred to as an onset. There are three types of onsets discussed in \textit{The Contemporary Singer}: glottal onset, aspirate onset and well-coordinated onset. Anne Peckham demonstrates the three onset types by using the phrase “I ate an apple.” She defines glottal attack as an “explosive onset of tone produced when air pressure is built up under closed vocal cords and suddenly released with a popping sound.” When a reader pronounces the phrase “I ate an apple,” they make slight glottal onsets at the beginning of each word. Peckham demonstrates this by having the reader say “I yea tan apple” to feel the connection between words and the absence of glottal attack. The aspirate onset begins with a small amount of air escaping before the tone is initiated. By adding an “H” sound to the beginning of each word, the reader may experience the aspirate onset sensation when he says, “(h)l (h)ate (h)an (h)apple.” The well-coordinated onset requires a balance between a glottal and an aspirate onset. Through this simple example, Peckham helps lead the reader to gain a clear understanding of initiating tone.\textsuperscript{59} Roger Kain also urges readers to avoid using an \textit{h} to separate the notes on descending scales because it will cause the voice to lose its connection. He continued by warning that the use of glottals may cause singers to cough their way through scales.
While the use of a well-coordinated onset will improve clarity and strength in the tone, many methods focus on resonance to improve tone. Bob Rose defines resonance as "sound directed into a cavity, which receives and amplifies it into colors according to its structure, determining the quality and volume of that sound." Rose distinguishes front nasal resonance from back nasal resonance by comparing the hum with ‘N’ (front) and the hum with ‘M’ (back). He demonstrates this difference in an exercise that included humming mum, mun, nun, and num to distinguish the types of nasal resonance by sensation. Rose also incorporates the sounds “oo” “e” and “a” in a partial yawn to lead the singer to discover the concept of throat resonance. By using the partial yawn rather than a full yawn, the singer should avoid letting the tone be swallowed or covered.

Many teachers instruct students based on resonant sensations felt in the forehead, cheekbones, nose and mouth. Dena Murray creates a specific list of sensations for men and women to expect throughout their range. For example, Murray proposes that in male singers, “from C1 to G1 the notes are primarily felt on the hard palate and heading just above it in the pocket behind the nose.”

When a singer carries a great deal of tension, they may have trouble attaining resonance or clarity regardless of how hard they try. Reducing the amount of tension in the jaw, tongue, throat, and neck will give the voice more flexibility and freedom. Murray instructs singers through a scale exercise: “Make sure that nothing moves as you come down the scale- not your tongue, mouth, or jaw. Everything should remain exactly the same from the moment you start that first note to the time you finish the last.” The use of lip trill is frequently recommended to ease lip and facial tension since the lips must
relax in order to blow air through them and trill. By incorporating the lip and tongue trill into the vocal workout routine, the jaw and face muscles must remain tension-free. Some singers may be unable to trill their lips without assistance. Seth Riggs suggests gently lifting the weight of the cheeks up by pressing the hands to the cheeks. If a singer continues to struggle, he offers a diagram illustrating his suggestion of raising the cheeks out of the way and bending forward to relax facial muscles. The singer will begin trilling lower pitches by lifting the cheeks and will lean forward as the pitch rises. The force of gravity that occurs when a singer is bending over should coerce the facial muscles to release and allow a lip trill.

Another frequent area of tension in singers is the tongue. Many singers pull their tongue back when they reach for a high note, which causes the throat to tense up. Dena Murray addresses the issue of tongue tension in singers and instructs readers to perform a self-evaluation by gently placing one finger under the chin and swallowing to feel the tongue muscles push down. The singer should then attempt to sing with the finger monitoring for movement. There should not be any muscle movement under the chin during singing.64

Registration

The voice is capable of covering a broad range of pitches moving from chest register into head register and eventually into falsetto. While the ideal singer is able to sing from their lowest note to their highest note with consistency of tone, many singers lack this consistency due to their break or passagio. Terminology between pedagogues may vary a great deal but most voice teachers aim for the same result of a seamless
transition between the lowest notes and the highest notes of a singers' range. Many singers struggle to maintain a consistent tone between registers within their range and experience voice cracks and abrupt changes in the volume or quality of tone as the voice shifts from one part of the range to another.

Peckham explains, “The shifting you feel is this complex series of muscles making the changes necessary for you to sing with different tone qualities. These adjustments can happen smoothly if your laryngeal muscles are coordinated, and the other aspects of your vocal technique are balanced.” Peckham, Riggs and Murray provided many methods to bridge the passage areas of the voice based on the idea of improving muscular coordination.

Dena Murray approaches the idea of bridging registers by defining the movements within the larynx: “To bridge the voice, the arytenoids (at the back of the throat) do most of the stretching, while the thyroid group (at the front) holds in a v-grip position. Technically, the thyroid group acts as bracing tension for the arytenoids as they stretch back for each pitch.”

There are numerous ways to improve this bridging of registers by stretching the arytenoids. Seth Riggs bases his speech-level singing method on the concept of maintaining a cry or buzz in the voice through the entire singing range. By focusing on keeping this cry through the full range, the vocal cords maintain closure and allow smooth transitions. Riggs explains, “vocal cords never open all at once and then close all at once when they vibrate. Even in your lowest tones, your vocal cords open from front to back and close from back to front…If you continue to use less and less air past the point where your cords have thinned as far as possible, the back ends of your cords
stay together.” The closure at the back of the cords bridges the chest mechanism and head mechanism to sound like one voice without breaks.

Seth Riggs incorporates this idea of lightening up the chest voice in order to bring it up to meet the higher registers. In *American Idol: Singers Advantage*, Riggs encourages singers to keep the cords adducted through their breaks by arpeggiating with a nasal and whiny ‘NAY’. He also teaches singers to pout while singing ‘MUM’ to lower the larynx during exercises in order to carry the chest voice up into a higher range.

In reviewing this group of resources, direct contradictions between techniques became apparent. One example of this discrepancy occurred with the idea of singing through the range from the low notes to the higher pitches. Roger Kain gives specific instructions to “go a little bit louder (sometimes a lot louder) when you go up; you can usually let the notes look after themselves when you come down.” Kain repeatedly instructs singers to “pull the diaphragm in for the high notes” and to “let it out for the low notes.” On the contrary, Roger Love insisted that in order to achieve the high notes comfortably, a singer must “stop getting louder as you get higher.” This opinion is echoed by Seth Riggs throughout his *Singing for the Stars* as he urges singers to remember that “the higher you sing, the less air you should use.” Riggs clarifies the importance of minimizing air pressure between breaks:

> When you reduce the amount of air you send to your vocal cords, you make it possible for the muscles inside your larynx to stretch your vocal cords by themselves. Your outer muscles are less likely to interfere because there isn’t as much air to hold back.

In Figure 11, Riggs encourages the inclusion of light chest voice or buzz in the higher notes and directed singers to “come down gently so you don’t ‘fall’ into [chest voice].”
Advanced Vocal Technique by Dena Murray utilizes the slide between notes to encourage singers to expand their range within the bridge. Within a two-octave range, singers are instructed to slide up an octave from the tonic and then descend down the scale.

Once a singer establishes a mixed voice and is able to carry a smooth tone through the entire range, they may experience strain when faced with a specific word pronunciation. Vowel modification is just one facet of singing that will ease tension through passage areas. Riggs listed some vowels to try in place of problematic ones:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If the problem vowel is:</th>
<th>Try:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a (as in “may”)</td>
<td>ee (as in “we”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a (as in “cat”)</td>
<td>eh (as in “let”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eh (as in “let”)</td>
<td>ih (as in “sit”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ih (as in “sit”)</td>
<td>ee (as in “we”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ah (as in “father”)</td>
<td>uh (as in “mother”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh (as in “mother”)</td>
<td>oo (as in “foot”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oo (as in “foot”)</td>
<td>oo (as in “toot”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These vowel modifications differ from typical classical modifications. While classical modifications focus on opening the vowels as the pitch ascends, Riggs’ recommendations require the singer to move to a closed vowel as the pitch increases. This modification towards the closed vowel will move the resonance to a nasal space, therefore creating a sound that can cut through loud accompaniment. By replacing problem vowels, the larynx should lower slightly and allow the mixed voice to sing without strain.

Microphone Technique, Stage Presence and The Business

Microphone technique and the use of electronic amplification are two important concepts that are imperative in commercial singing but are typically not discussed in traditional vocal pedagogy literature. Singers of commercial music should become familiar with how to use a microphone in a studio setting as well as in a live performance. Pedagogue Rachel Lebon explains “In order to be an effective and healthy professional singer you should regard the microphone as a valuable ally, for it enables you to project the vocal sound with less exertion while achieving a relaxed, conversational approach that would not be possible acoustically, particularly in large performance settings.”77 The proximity from microphone to mouth can change the vocal tone that is projected to the audience. Most singers will keep the microphone within six inches of their mouth in a live performance. Lebon remarks: “Very subtle shifts in direction or distance can affect the timbre of the singer’s voice as well as the feeling of ‘presence,’ so it is important to ‘work’ the mike, remaining alert to the way it ‘hears’ your own individual instrument.”78 She explains that the type of microphone and its sensitivity
determine how far a singer may pull the microphone away from their mouth on a high or loud passage. If a singer pulls the mic away too quickly or too far from their mouth, the signal will completely disappear and the sound will be lost.

The information included in the literature by Seth Riggs primarily focuses on vocal technique and building the voice; however, Riggs briefly comments that “electronic amplification and alteration of your voice have an important place in the communication and entertainment media, but they must not be thought to replace healthy and efficient vocal production.”

Anne Peckham echoes the same idea by warning that a microphone should not replace good vocal technique. In *Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer*, she encourages singers to “practice first without a microphone to establish good projection and resonance awareness. Be sure you’re not relying on the microphone to create warm tone and projection.” She explains, “You have to develop these qualities as a part of your own vocal skills, to use with or without amplification.”

In *The Contemporary Singer*, Peckham illustrates the type of microphone, cable and adapters that a singer should be familiar with for a live performance setting. Peckham warns readers about the “all-too-familiar screeching sound you get sometimes when using a mic” and explained that in order to avoid feedback, the singer should not point the microphone toward the speaker or monitors.

Without the assistance of a control room engineer, as a studio session would have, a singer must be familiar enough with the microphone to adjust volume levels and tone from on stage by working the mic while avoiding feedback from monitors.

While live sound is covered briefly in his book, Claytoven Richardson focuses on microphone usage in a studio setting. Images of recording studio setups are included.
along with descriptions of the control board, isolation booth and live rooms in an effort to familiarize singers with a typical recording location. Richardson explains the differences between dynamic microphones, ribbon microphones and condenser microphones. Dynamic microphones, which are great for live vocal performance, are not typically used in vocal recording sessions. Richardson speaks of the ribbon microphone being used in vintage jazz vocal recordings. He explains that they are very delicate and can sound dull at times, but they offer a vintage sound in a recording session. The microphone recommended by Richardson for recording sessions for a vocalist is a condenser mic. Their ability to pick up transient sounds is emphasized and more specifically, the tube condenser mic is listed as a favorite of the author. The distance between the microphone and singer in a studio can change the entire sound of a session. Richardson recommends that a singer begin by standing six inches from the mic and allowing the engineer to direct positioning from there. The use of tape to mark the floor was mentioned as a means to keep a consistent distance from the microphone throughout a session. The book includes an illustration of each microphone listening pattern. Figure 13 displays the three patterns: the cardioid pattern, the bi-directional pattern and the omni-directional pattern.
Figure 13. Listening patterns for studio microphones by Claytoven Richardson

This illustration is included to show singers where to place themselves within the listening area during recording sessions. In the event that a singer must maintain close proximity to the microphone, Richardson expresses his concern with the pronunciation of plosive consonants like \( p \) and \( b \). Singing so closely into the mic could allow the puffs of air in plosive consonants to cause loud popping sounds in a recording. A singer should use a windscreen, sometimes known as a *pop*-stopper, to filter some of the air stream from the mic and to turn the head slightly to the side when singing a loud plosive consonant. Anne Peckham reiterates this point by instructing singers to “hold the microphone at an angle to the mouth, lightly articulating \( p \)’s and \( t \)’s over the top of the mic rather than directly into it.”

The importance of listening during a recording session is emphasized in *The Professional Studio Vocalist*. According to Richardson, headphones are “one of the most valuable tools of the professional studio vocalist.” Headphones not only allow the singer to hear their accompaniment music, but also allow the singer to hear their own vocal track in real time. The author notes “the mistake made by most inexperienced
singers [by] fully covering their ears when wearing [headphones]. Without the ability to hear the voice acoustically, the singer may have trouble hearing if they are in tune, sharp or flat. “One of the most common ways of wearing headphones is with one side off and muffled against the back of your head, while the other side covers the other ear completely.” Using the headphones in this fashion during a recording session would allow the singer to hear an acoustic version of their voice while eliminating any bleed of sound from the headphones into the microphone.

In addition to having a general knowledge of the recording process and being prepared to record, singers for studio sessions must be excellent sight-readers and must have remarkable control over their voices. Pitch must be impeccable since each recording costs time and therefore money. Richardson suggests rehearsing with an electronic tuner and building precision in tuning before heading into a recording studio. The detailed descriptions from Claytoven Richardson of studio recording sessions should assist singers in preparing for their own session work, but most singers experience live performances before stepping into the studio.

When performing in a live setting, it is important for the singer to pay close attention to their presence on stage. Using body movement, good eye contact and audience interaction can make a performance memorable and exciting for an audience. In *The Contemporary Singer*, Anne Peckham points out the importance of eye contact during a performance despite performance anxiety:

Although you might want to close your eyes to aid concentration and ward off self-consciousness, this can keep you from communicating with your audience. Try to keep your eyes open and focus outward to relate your song. In a small space, try looking at your audience’s foreheads or earlobes to give the sense you are directly looking at them without having to make eye contact.
Peckham also mentions the use of hand gestures when performing. She emphasizes that following through with hand gestures was important to appear calm and at ease on stage. She recommends talking to the mirror and observing how your hand gestures flow and apply that movement during performance. The singer should pay attention to the venue and audience size and the feel of a performance: “The size of your performing venue and the style of music you sing will dictate the size of your gestures and expressions. In a large auditorium, you can make larger gestures, move more, and fill the room with your energy. In a smaller venue, you can tone down the activity of your body, hands, and face, but keep the emotional energy level high.”

By studying these resources concerning microphone technique and stage performance, singers may gain the insight necessary to prepare to enter the commercial voice business.

In the commercial singing business talent and technique are important, but singers must know how to represent themselves to performance venues, instrumentalists and talent scouts. Professionalism and appearance are two main factors in succeeding at networking, which is imperative to building a performance career in commercial music. Anne Peckham explains the harsh reality that “sometimes, auditioners are looking for a specific ‘look’ or physical type, and if you don’t fit that image, you can be ruled out.”

A singer must treat their craft as a business, which means they need promotional materials. The Professional Studio Vocalist includes information about recording demo tracks and ordering business cards. The explanation of labor unions and networking are included as Claytoven Richardson breaks down the steps a singer needs to follow in order to achieve a studio career.
The commercial music business is a competitive industry and requires singers who are talented, professional, good at networking and are familiar with the industry. Anne Peckham and Claytoven Richardson provide information in their books to offer instruction and help prepare singers for work in the field.

Extreme Vocal Technique and Styles

While a solid foundation of basic vocal technique is recommended for anyone who wishes to sing professionally, stylistic elements of each genre are required for authenticity. Pop styles may require full chest-voice, the use of melismas, and the ability to transition from a light breathy tone into a full sound without breaking. Country singing may require a fast vibrato, a strong strident belt voice and even the use of yodeling. Gospel and Blues singers may use growling and an edgy tone in the high voice and jazz requires a conversational tone and the ability to improvise. Rock and metal genres may require an aggressive tone, extended yelling and a grainy tone. Many of these elements cause singers to strain and abuse their voices until serious damage occurs. If a singer needs to scream or yell in an extremely low or high range, proper training can help them to avoid this vocal damage while allowing for authentic sound. Roger Kain offers readers instructions to perform the “ultra-low sounds” of death metal, grunge rock and thrash styles. When he illustrated the exercise in figure 14, he reminded singers: “Don’t force these low notes, or you won’t get down to them.” Female singers are encouraged to reach Db2 and male singers were instructed to reach Db1. These extreme low notes could cause vocal exhaustion if executed incorrectly. Kain frequently reminds singers to pull in the diaphragm and ‘constipate’ the notes.
Extreme rock styles require these low notes with dark timbre in a yelling sound, but also require screaming at times. Screams may be in full voice or in a falsetto voice depending upon the style of rock. Bands like Paramore use full voice yelling mixed with singing in an edgy mixed voice, Flyleaf incorporates loud screaming in a high chest range and singers like Alice Cooper scream with a glam-rock falsetto-based scream. Roger Kain defines screaming as “an extension (or extreme form) of the falsetto head voice.” The Complete Vocal Workout offers several exercises to prepare singers for the extreme vocal demands of death metal and hard rock. The use of a bratty whiny tone encourages the voice to bridge into a scream, reminding singers to “push the jaw right down on all the open sounds, keep the tongue against the bottom teeth, pull in the diaphragm on the highest note of each phrase, and constipate for the most extravagant sounds.”

In Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer, Anne Peckham divides exercises by style. While Peckham doesn’t address the stylistic requirements for each type of music, each warm-up incorporates common rhythmic figures and applicable scale patterns. Jazz exercises are accompanied by an acoustic trio and included scooping up to each starting pitch while reminding the singer to relax the pronunciation of each word. The gospel swing exercise in Figure 15 is based on typical chord changes
and uses rhythmic phrases that frequently appeared in gospel music. Peckham notes that eighth notes should not rush and that syllables should be under-pronounced.

Figure 15. Gospel swing by Anne Peckham.

Peckham’s Latin examples require singers to maintain a straight tone for each lengthy passage. In Latin singing, scoops should be avoided and intonation must be precise. Pop and R&B examples teach the pentatonic scale and include difficult rhythmic syncopation. While many exercises use common song phrases, Figure 16 uses syllabic passages to familiarize singers with common licks found in pop singing.

Figure 16. Pentatonic patterns by Anne Peckham.

*Advanced Vocal Technique* by Dena Murray includes distinguishing characteristics of each mainstream vocal style. She begins by dissecting the genre of jazz, emphasizing the importance of tone and pitch accuracy. “Jazz singers are seen more as instrumentalists than straight singers, while crooners are more famous for the
tone of their voices and how they wrap that tone around every word. Jazz singing may include changing vocal timbre to imitate the sound of a horn or percussion instrument. Murray advises singers to smile when singing the jazz idiom to keep a bright vocal quality and increased precision.

The country music genre requires a very forward placement and a twang in the pronunciation of lyrics. The use of yodeling has diminished, but still appears at the ends of phrases. When focusing on the idiomatic treatment of vowels, “a good rule of thumb is to always feel the air striking the front of your hard palate.”

According to Dena Murray, the vocal placement of R&B singing should be based on a speech placement with the vowels toward the back of the hard palate. Phrases that need strong emotion may call for a light raspiness in the voice or a heavy chest voice. Singers are also advised to experiment with grunting and growling for this style.

Similar to R&B, rock music may require growling, raspiness, and belting. The loud, edgy singing associated with rock music may be harmful to the voice if it is achieved through straining and pushing. To avoid damage while projecting the voice over a band, singing should originate from the speaking voice. Maintaining a speech-level quality will add an edge to the tone and allow the voice to cut through the instrumental accompaniment. Dena Murray offers this advice for rock technique:

To strengthen the voice without straining, try saying ‘HEY’ or ‘HO’ on a pitch in the middle of your range. Keep the vowels on the front of the hard palate while maintaining an open relaxed throat (like a tube for air to travel through). Now, add a little volume, as if you were trying to shout. When the volume increases, the muscles should not tighten. Murray also emphasizes the importance of warming up the voice when singing rock music due to its strenuous nature.
Pop music encompasses such a wide array of styles, each having stylistic demands. Murray suggests that the bridged voice, or mixed voice, would be most useful for this style of singing. She mentions the frequent use of melismas and recommends singing them with a light tone that is not breathy. One way to practice conveying a lyric without strain, is to read the lyrics aloud and project them without pushing or squeezing.

Vocal Health and Hygiene

The voice of a singer should be regarded as a fairly delicate instrument and treated with great care. It is important for aspiring singers to understand what vocal habits may cause harm and which techniques promote healthy voice use. Many aspects of vocal health are identical between traditional vocal technique guides and commercial singing sources, such as staying hydrated, getting rest and avoiding late night eating. Because many commercial performances occur in clubs and bars with background noise, smoke, late hours and long sets, the commercial vocalist may face additional obstacles, which require further information regarding vocal hygiene. Bob Rose highlights the vulnerability of the vocal instrument by stating that, “the voice is a physical, mental and emotional instrument. It is contained and living inside your body; therefore, all things that affect you, affect it- from your diet to your emotions.”96 Not only should a singer pay close attention to staying hydrated and avoiding bad habits, they must also remember to speak with well-supported projection and stretch the voice through warming up exercises. Claytoven Richardson compares singing to the performance of professional athletes:

A quarterback or pitcher doesn’t come out of the locker room, get immediately in the game, and start throwing 60-yard passes or 90-mph fast balls without first
warming up with a few practice throws. They wouldn’t be able to perform at their best. There is also a higher risk of injury. Treat your voice the same way as these pro athletes treat their arms, by warming up before you get into heavy singing.\(^97\)

By preventing vocal fatigue and following vocal health measures, a singer may avoid simple problems like laryngitis and, more importantly, avoid serious vocal pathologies. Exercising and stretching the voice before a performance or lengthy practice session is an imperative step in maintaining vocal health. Roger Kain defends his extreme vocal warm-ups:

Contrary to popular belief, singers should usually do the big, heavy exercises before they move on to the lighter, more delicate stuff. This is where the big mistakes are made in warm-ups: too many teachers start with gentle exercises, so no real stretching is done.\(^98\)

Kain’s exercise in Figure 17 brings the chest voice up into a higher register in an effort to protect singers from straining during a performance. The singer is instructed to treat every note equally in importance and to perform the exercise loudly.

Figure 17. Bringing the chest voice up by Roger Kain.

In addition to warming up the voice before heavy usage, singers who desire a commercial vocal career should maintain a healthy lifestyle with exercise and a well-balanced diet. Bob Rose includes a checklist of items that should be in every singer’s gig bag to ensure that a singer is prepared to protect their voice in any performance environment. Some of the recommended items included saline nasal spray, slippery elm lozenges, nasal strips, antacid, eye drops and petroleum jelly.\(^99\)
Bob Rose and Claytoven Richardson both caution singers against ingesting dairy products and sugary foods prior to performing, because they both may produce a thicker mucous which may cause the need to clear the throat excessively. Peckham conveys the importance of listening to your own body and knowing how your individual voice will be affected by medications and other factors. “While a cup of coffee might trigger the jitters, dry throat, or excess mucus production in some people, it might have little effect on others.”

Despite intense efforts to follow proper voice care techniques, illness and fatigue are sometimes unavoidable. When a singer is faced with choosing to perform or not due to illness, they must carefully evaluate the situation. Singing while suffering a cold may only bring a nasal quality to the voice, but that singing through a throat infection may cause serious damage. By practicing good vocal technique consistently, a singer may be physically capable of performing in less than perfect conditions. Anne Peckham states in *The Contemporary Singer*, “When an occasional cold comes on, you can rely on breath support and body awareness to get through rehearsals and concerts without exacerbating fatigue or doing permanent damage.” If a singer must perform despite illness, many home remedies claim to heal the hoarse voice, and medications are available to reduce vocal cord swelling.

*Contemporary Singing Techniques*, by Bob Rose, includes advice for singers who may be experiencing hoarseness by recommending drinking “herbal tea for opening up, warming and soothing the throat and nasals”. Rose promotes the use of a light salt-water solution as a gargle in the morning and evening and mentioned slippery elm lozenges for soothing an irritated throat. Claytoven Richardson insists,
“some people swear by drinking warm tea with a little honey and lemon. Please don’t do it. Drinking the combination of these three things does have a soothing effect; however, they actually will cause drying.” Caffeine is a diuretic and therefore has a drying effect over the entire body. The use of antihistamines is also highly discouraged due to their drying properties. The vocal cords must remain lubricated to function optimally. To counter the drying properties of air conditioning, Richardson turns off hotel air conditioners and travels with a personal humidifier to provide moisture to the air.

Singers may experience worrisome symptoms such as huskiness or hoarseness from over-use or illness occasionally but when other vocal problems occur, a visit to an otolaryngologist may be in order. Peckham lists some symptoms that may indicate vocal damage or vocal problems such as sudden loss of high range or a feeling of pain after singing. She cautions singers to “avoid taking pain medicines when you’re performing.” Pain medications may mask fatigue and cause a singer to over-sing, which could lead to fragile capillaries and end with serious vocal damage.

One common cause of vocal damage that is unrelated to voice use is the damaging effect of acid reflux. Dena Murray explains:

Food enters the stomach from the esophagus via a muscular sphincter. This sphincter- the connection between the esophagus and the stomach- is supposed to prevent food from passing back up the esophagus. Inside the stomach, gastric juices (known as pepsin and acid) break down the food for digestion. The seepage of acid back up into the esophagus via that muscle sphincter is referred to as acid reflux.

Dena Murray describes her personal experience with voice loss and her discovery of her own problem with acid reflux. In addition to the symptoms of acid reflux, common treatments are also mentioned in Advanced Vocal Technique.
Each resource includes information concerning vocal health and hygiene in an effort to lead singers to be aware of protecting their instrument. In addition to listing do's and don’ts of vocal health, each compact disc repeatedly warned singers to stop singing if strain or fatigue ensued. The use of any self-taught vocal method media should be used with caution and self-awareness to minimize damaging the voice due to over-use. Singing with the assistance of an instructor or vocal coach could ensure that exercises are sung properly without excessive tension.
In reviewing the selected literature, it became apparent that each genre required specific instruction for the stylistic elements of the various idioms. Some of the material seemed to appeal to the beginning singer while other sources included terminology that would only be familiar to an advanced singer or instructor. The ability to read music was not necessary in most of the resources since they included CD accompaniment with instruction. With the use of any instructional guide, there could be a danger of harming the voice if the singer does not heed the warnings included. Having an instructor who is familiar with these techniques could be beneficial to singers and may alleviate the possibility of vocal damage.

All of the resources for this study included information regarding vocal health and explanations of the vocal mechanism. Anne Peckham and Seth Riggs seemed to illustrate the parts of the larynx in the most clear and precise way. The clarity of their illustrations should engage the readers to take the time to learn about their voices and how they voice works. While Bob Rose and Deena Murray covered the laryngeal mechanism at length, the detailed sections and the diagrams and figures could be too scientific and advanced to keep the attention of a self-taught singer. The most significant benefit of *Contemporary Singing Techniques*¹⁰⁸ by Bob Rose was the inclusion of a “gig-bag” checklist for singers. The items included in his list gave insight to singers about maintaining a performance career and the potential obstacles that a vocalist may face when “gigging.”
Breathing is such an important part of singing that it was surprising that all sources did not include lessons or advice for breathing. Roger Love was the only author to insist on breathing through the nose. He included a unique exercise in *Sing Like The Stars* that familiarized readers with the concept of the breath hitting the vocal cords before phonation:

1. Make a peace sign with your fingers and face your hand toward you.
2. Bring your fingers really close to your lips.
3. Now blow air easily right through the open space between your two fingers. That’s basically what happens when the vocal cords are open and the air blows right through. If you sang with the cords in this position you would sound airy and breathy, like Mariah Carey does when she sings down low.
4. Now close your fingers together and continue to try to blow air through. Do you feel how your fingers block the air? That’s basically what the cords are doing in the closed position. If you sang with the cords like that, you would sound edgy, thick, and powerful, like Sting.

This demonstration seemed simple enough to incorporate in lessons for students of all ages. It gave a visual representation of something that can be difficult to explain to singers. Another example that could be especially helpful to beginning students is the dog pant exercise by Bob Rose. Some students create difficulties by trying to engage their abdominal muscles and feel their diaphragm moving. By panting with a dropped jaw, students may access this movement more quickly.

Vocal tone appeared to be an important part of each commercial singing guide. Resonance exercises were a major part of *Advanced Vocal Technique* by Dena Murray and *Contemporary Singing Techniques* by Bob Rose. Rose approached resonance from a scientific point of view and explained the concept of nasal, oral and throat resonance. By using concrete definitions and humming examples to teach these concepts, it may be easier for a singer to grasp and implement his ideas over the
explanations of Murray. Dena Murray based her book on the ability of singers to be highly aware of sensations felt in the head, chest and throat. All of the examples were explained according to feelings and physical sensations. Beginning singers may not have an awareness of the way the voice feels and many vocalists can experience different sensations when performing identical exercises. Seth Riggs focused more on tone than any other concept in his book *Singing for the Stars*. He instructed readers to whine and sob to achieve a buzzy tone and while the intended result was an even registration, the tone was the primary concept. Roger Kain called for whiny and bratty tones to complete screaming and crying exercises. Maintaining this whine throughout the song is imperative if a singer wants to achieve extreme vocals, however, Kain did not offer guidance to lead singers to find a good whine sound. Anne Peckham taught the idea of vocal tone by example on the CD workouts for both *The Contemporary Singer* and *Vocal Workouts for Contemporary Singers*. The vocal tone used in pop warm-ups differed from the jazz tone or the aggressive nature used in rock examples. The explanation for vocal onsets seemed complete and the spoken example Peckham used with the phrase “I ate an apple” should make the difference between onsets clear to students.

The problem of registration through the vocal range can incapacitate aspiring commercial singers. While the idea of carrying the chest voice up and bridging into a head mechanism appeared in all of the technical books, Seth Riggs placed the most emphasis on this concept. Speech-Level Singing was designed to bridge the breaks in the voice and allow a relaxed use of the full voice. His progression from lip trill through full singing offered a seemingly easy break down of the steps to achieving a seamless
range. Though Roger Love and Dena Murray echoed the concepts of Speech-Level
Singing, Riggs seemed to explain the steps in a fashion conducive to beginners as well
as advanced singers and teachers. The instructional CD’s by Seth Riggs could prove to
be most user-friendly since they take each exercise from a bass range through a
soprano range. The CD’s by Bob Rose included exercises by a student with his voice
overdubbing instructions. This format seemed to be suited for instructors and advanced
singers with a well-trained ear. Roger Kain requested singers to carry the chest voice up
by pressing hard and violently exercising the diaphragm. His use of extreme language
could be potentially harmful to singers who may over-sing or misinterpret his text.

The ability for a singer to understand the music business is imperative at this
time, due to the increase in self-promotion and the decrease of record contracts. The
Professional Studio Vocalist by Claytoven Richardson included such a variety of
information that it appeared to be essential for singers wanting to build a career.
Richardson shared ideas for websites, business cards, and demo CD’s with readers. He
emphasized the importance of professionalism and explained music unions and
contracts to help singers avoid the pitfalls of the music business. The microphone
technique represented in The Contemporary Singer by Anne Peckham could equip
singers with enough information to purchase the correct type of mic. She included ideas
for stage movement and interacting with the audience and addressed the issue of stage
fright. Roger Love also advised readers about stage fright and while he spoke of stage
presence, his book did not address it in detail. Any vocalist who aspires to build a
performance career in music should include The Professional Studio Vocalist and The
Contemporary Singer in their reading list.
Singers should gain the ability to perform commercial styles with authenticity, whether the genre requires belting, yodeling or rapping. Roger Kain dedicated his entire book to handling extreme vocal styles like screaming and yelling. Though his book included many exercises to lead students to handle screaming, it did not appear to teach singers to scream within a song or for a specific length of time. The wording of his instructions seemed confusing and singers who consult this book for guidance should be careful not to strain the voice. Screaming and belting can be achieved without damaging the voice, but success in these areas may require face-to-face instruction. Anne Peckham and Dena Murray both explained the differences between popular styles of vocal music. Murray described the specific changes in style while Peckham demonstrated these concepts within each vocal exercise of *Vocal Workouts for the Contemporary Singer*. Though the descriptions by Murray were detailed and clearly explained, Peckham’s book may be more apt for singers who want to branch out in popular styles and for teachers who want to gain an understanding of the differences between genres.

Each of the sources contained information, which was specific to commercial vocal styles. All of the techniques were based on the traditional teachings of bel canto singing but could appeal to an audience who was not interested in singing traditional vocal music. The language in most of these resources was simple enough for a beginning singer and avoided too many technical terms, which could cause confusion. Regardless of the style of music or the resource chosen for study, an understanding of basic vocal technique is crucial for singers who aspire to enjoy long and successful singing careers.
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