

MODULE 4
BMPF7073D

Understanding and Teaching Emotional Expression in Popular Music Singing
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PORTFOLIO

Introduction

As a contemporary Singing Teacher, an area of my professional practice that requires attention is understanding and teaching emotional expression in Popular Music (PM) singing. In my teaching experience, some singers find this more natural than others. Therefore, this study is intended to develop my knowledge and teaching strategies to help those who find it harder to connect to their voice with expressive freedom.

This is necessary because expression in singing is known to often not be taught as readily or easily, is less well-defined than technical aspects (Juntunen, Arlin and Liira, 2023), and even considered innate rather than teachable by some (Rodrigues, Rodrigues and Correia, 2008). Yet, training that results in versatile vocal expression is said to be the goal of teaching singing (Rooney, 2016; Fields, 1972/2019), with strong emphasis put on the importance of expressivity and emotional connection for PM and other contemporary-style singers (Hughes, 2014; Rooney, 2016).

There is evidence that the range of vocal expression for the contemporary singer is greater than for the Western Classical singer (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2019). However, the amount of research specific to contemporary vocal styles remains relatively small (Bartlett, 2014). This study will seek to gather existing, relevant literature, including making multi-disciplinary connections, to improve my teaching practice in this area.

Planned Programme of Study

Context

This research will be situated within the field of voice pedagogy and will draw from psychology and potentially other fields. These will be approached to bring in relevant expansion to my learning through this programme of study, influencing my singing teaching practice after critical evaluation and synthesis. My practice as a singing teacher involves working with a wide range of PM singers, both vocational and avocational. The current span of ages of my students is from teens to 60s, although most are in their 20s and 30s. Within this, there is diversity of vocal tendencies, abilities and styles (including pop, rock, contemporary Christian worship and R&B). As part of this, my vocal students display varied levels of expression, ranging from those who seem to emote and express themselves through their vocal performance with ease to those who find it hard to be emotionally

expressive in their singing or grasp how to be. Therefore, it is the students on the latter half of the spectrum I am most interested to better assist as a consequence of this study.

Aims

- Identify and evaluate fundamental understanding and existing strategies relating to expressivity and emotion in relation to the PM singer.
- Select strategies for implementation into my teaching practice.

Objectives

- What insights from existing literature on this topic are there within vocal pedagogy, particularly relating to contemporary-style voice?
- What insights from existing literature are there to develop my understanding and practice from other fields, such as psychology?
- To conduct the literature review in a way that is more robust than my previous ones, to aid my development and the quality of the resulting review.
- To evaluate strategies from the literature that could be brought into my teaching.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- To develop skills to conduct a higher-quality, methodical literature review.
- To develop the cognitive and intellectual component of my work, as suggested by feedback from the previous module.
- To bring learnings and relevant strategies from this study into my teaching practice to benefit the PM singers I work with.

Timescales and Review Dates

The timescale has been carefully considered to be achievable and meet the proposed aims, objectives and outcomes. This is shown on the following GAANT chart, including review dates for adjustments to be made to the proposed timeline.

TASK	18-Aug	25-Aug	01-Sep	08-Sep	15-Sep	22-Sep	29-Sep	06-Oct	13-Oct	20-Oct	27-Oct	03-Nov	10-Nov	17-Nov	24-Nov	01-Dec	08-Dec	15-Dec	22-Dec	29-Dec	05-Jan	12-Jan
Course Materials																						
Course Content (read/watch)																						
Assessment																						
Area of Study / Initial Literature																						
Portfolio Writing																						
Literature Review																						
Project Report Writing																						
Draft Assignment	D = deadline 8/Dec, ED = extended deadline 15/Dec																					
Final Assignment	D = deadline 5/Jan, ED = extended deadline 12/Jan																					
Review Dates Set																						
Marks released on Turnitin 12/Feb/26																						

Figure 1 – GAANT Chart

Methodology

I have selected a Narrative literature review methodology as Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2013) deem this to have become a viable approach and useful for all research fields. It is considered the most common type of review (Winter, 2023). Though a systematic review was not possible due to the individual nature of this study (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2013), aspects of the systematic methodology – such as search strategy – were employed from the work of Xiao and Watson (2017) to improve the rigour and quality of the data collected and considered for inclusion. Other methodologies were carefully considered, for example, a Commentary review was decided against due to the intrinsic bias towards expressed opinions it is identifiable for and its lessened formality (Winter, 2023). Therefore, the Narrative review was preferred.

To further secure the rigour of the literature review, some elements of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method (Liberati et al, 2009) were used to enhance the process. This was deemed appropriate due to its usage in other Voice Pedagogy literature reviews including Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero (2023) and Mazzarolo, Burwell and Schubert (2023). From the extensive PRISMA method designed for systematic reviews, one element I chose to implement was to mitigate the risk of bias by seeking to present as full a cross-section from the available resources as possible within the constraints of the assignment and voice any possible bias (Liberati et al, 2009).

As a starting point, searches were made within the UWTSD online library. Search dates were set for the past 20 years, from 2005, to yield enough results and capture the

landscape. A first search that used the terms “emotion” AND “singing” AND “popular music” yielded 36 results, and a less genre-restricted search using “vocal expression” AND “singing” yielded 187 results, with a total of 33 papers being selected as relevant from these (a number of these featured in both searches). Additionally, other databases, including Google Scholar and ProQuest were checked for any further relevant papers. Many papers already identified were brought up, however, a smaller number of new materials were uncovered. The inclusion criteria prioritised papers that were specific to contemporary singing and preferred to include those discussing some theory, testing or method of how to apply it in singing. However, psychology papers and books relevant to understanding emotion were also included, and further fields were explored as the bringing together of knowledge from connecting fields is what literature reviews can be useful for, according to Winter (2023).

According to Adams, Smart and Huff (2017), grey literature is suggested to contribute to diversity and increase relevance and influence within the area of practice it is reporting on, and Winter (2023) considers the inclusion of non-peer-reviewed literature as being necessary for the still-developing field of voice pedagogy. Therefore, some grey practitioner literature was included to gain a more complete picture of existing understanding and practice, which also led to mining references from the chapter on expression within Benson (2020).

All resources were scan-read for relevance at this point, with some discarded. The remaining were read more fully, and use of the hermeneutic circle (a framework for understanding the full body of applicable literature as well as each part) was made by the reading of some papers, leading to other relevant texts (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2013). Additionally, Google AI was used to find further papers by posing questions that arose from reading some portions of papers, and proved useful in serving the hermeneutic circle approach and identifying papers that answered the gaps of the previous one.

These methodological selections were made from a pragmatic approach to best meet the purpose of the study and answer the research question by any suitable means (Feilzer, 2010), including an openness towards drawing from literature from fields outside of voice pedagogy and beyond only white literature.

Hakanpää (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen 2018, 2019, 2023; Hakanpää, 2022) is a figure who most commonly came up regarding this subject, with her doctoral dissertation and 3 peer-reviewed papers within the past 7 years. Her work covers the specifics of emotional expression in the contemporary commercial voice and a method of teaching it, making it very

relevant to my research topic. I acknowledge the greater number of papers considered for inclusion from this researcher in the following literature review. Yet, I add that many varied academic researchers with alternative viewpoints are also set for inclusion, with a diverse mix of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research.

The writing of a stand-alone review, as in this case, is intended to comprehend the topic by integrating and interpreting the existing literature (Rousseau, Manning, and Denyer, 2008). Additionally, a literature review is reported to help identify applicable theories and avoid those that will not produce the desired result (Randolph, 2009). Therefore, all of the above has been conducted to help steer towards meeting the aims of the study and answer the research question through the resulting literature review included in the following report.

PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to gain a deeper understanding of expressivity and emotion in Popular Music (PM) singing and gather strategies on how to better teach this to vocal students. This will be of particular benefit to my teaching practice for those singers who do not naturally exude a strongly identifiable emotional connection in their singing.

Emotions can be defined as temporary states of mind that direct our reactions to external and internal stimuli and are common to us all, though what evokes each state is individually variable (Dennison, 2024). Leading on from this, expression can be defined as how we externalise the emotions we experience, which can include our artistic expression (Xu et al, 2025).

PM includes the widely circulating genres of pop, rock, and R&B (Steinbrecher, 2022). PM singing, which uses contemporary vocal styles, requires singers to retain a recognisably unique vocal sound and to express themselves artistically within the specific aesthetic speech-quality expectations of their particular PM genre (Bartlett and Naismith, 2020). Regarding the teaching approach of such styles, Bartlett and Naismith (2020) found there was an agreement to observe and help balance emotional expression with its impact on vocal production for the long-term vocal health of singers we work with and highlight the need for a distinct contemporary vocal pedagogy appropriate to the expectations of non-Western Classical styles.

To delve deeper into this topic and help identify strategies that could be included in contemporary vocal pedagogy for expression, a literature review has been conducted.

Literature Review

The Current Understanding and Practices of Singing Teachers

Firstly, it would be useful to look at the current understanding and practices of distinguished and broadcast talent show singing teachers and vocal coaches from an interview-based study by Rooney (2016), with one commonality between them identified as the need for singing teachers to help singers perform with emotional awareness. This requires teachers to have a range of genre-relevant, engaging exercises that help connect with the song, express emotion in their performance, and sense how that affects their vocal quality, all for

the purpose of the audience feeling that emotional connection (Rooney, 2016). PM, as a contemporary vocal style, has been recognised as requiring its own techniques and ways of expressing emotions, with growing agreement on the need for greater integration between the technical and the expressive elements of vocal performance (Bartlett and Naismith, 2020; Sun, 2024). Sun (2024) is positioned towards a clear and systemic training pedagogy with two suggestions for inclusion being singing a familiar scale with various emotional intents and reflecting on videos of practices or performances. There is also an importance on artistry for singers of contemporary vocal styles, such as PM, which Hughes (2014, 2017) defines as the amalgamation of expression, uniqueness and authenticity to the style with them as a singer.

In agreement with Bartlett and Naismith (2020) and Hughes (2017), Rooney (2016) reported the importance of considering vocal health in all aspects of developing the singer and the pedagogy in use, including expressivity, with professionals needing to have the stamina to sing for 3-6 hours a day. In terms of specific tools or techniques that may be of use to the singer for expressivity, there is mention of using vocal modelling or mimicry, but only to aid exploration of the singer's own sound and expressive possibilities (Hughes, 2017) and the use of imagery, but only when it is skilfully applied and science-based to avoid causing the singer confusion (Chapman, 2016). This comment is worth noting as the traditional method of teaching emotional expression for singers is through imagery techniques brought in from theatre pedagogy (Hakanpää, 2022). A further intervention for consideration is the value of acting training, with singers with acting experience being appraised as having greater emotional genuineness than those without acting experience (Livingstone, Choi and Russo, 2014).

Regarding this discussion, in relation to my teaching practice with a mixture of vocational and avocational PM singers, I consider some of the singers I work with (such as those who write original songs) have greater need to work on a more complete spectrum of what artistry involves (Hughes 2014, 2017), whereas hobbyists may have more use from the expressive element than the uniqueness element of artistry. From this information alone, while I agree about having a wide range of exercises for expression as a singing teacher (Rooney, 2016), it is hard to judge the worthiness and usefulness of the few specified strategies due to the lack of expansion of the method of applying them or any science that has informed them.

The Underpinnings of Neuroscience and Psychology

Before considering the specific stances and overall approaches for addressing emotional expression for the PM singer that are covered in the literature, we will look to neuroscience and psychology for a fuller understanding of what emotions are and how our brains process and express them.

According to Sachs et al (2016), there are highly individual differences in neural wiring and the connectivity of sensory processing and emotional processing areas of the brain in response to music stimuli and the level of reward stimuli. The higher this response, the more naturally wired for expressivity the person is due to the strength of emotional comprehension, which should be transferable to creating music and singing, not just listening, using these established pathways (Sachs et al, 2016). They reported lower white matter connectivity in individuals with differences in their social and emotional processing, such as can be the case for autistic individuals (Sachs et al, 2016). Similarly, Cheng et al (2023) reported findings that autistic people may have impaired pitch perception and sound imitation, and emotional recognition, which may influence their vocal production. Similarly, Greenspon and Montanaro (2022) found that those with impaired recognition of emotions may find that this affects their vocal production and perception. However, there is positive news for those with weaker neural wiring, as both vocalists and instrumentalists in their study showed capacity for neural plasticity (brain rewiring), which can be influenced through ongoing musical training (Cheng et al, 2023).

Interestingly, those who map pitch better also tend to map vocal emotion better (Schelinski and von Kriegstein, 2019; Cheng et al, 2023) as there are interactions of the same sensorimotor networks for both of these elements of vocal prosody when singing (rather than speaking), which is stated as having the greatest emotional expressivity of all musical forms in a study where two-thirds of participants were singers or musicians (Cheng et al, 2023). This singing-specific pitching and emotion connection gives value to the role of the Singing Teacher in providing ongoing vocal training supportive of developing these areas, where one strategy may be to dual-train both pitch perception and emotional recognition and replication in singing to potentially more comprehensively secure improvement in the expressivity of singers (Cheng et al, 2023). However, though Greenspon and Montanaro (2022) agree on there being shared processing between areas contributing to vocal prosody, they report that overall singing ability and verbal short-term memory (rather than pitch mapping and musical training) is a better predictor of accurate emotional recognition. This discrepancy between Greenspon and Montanaro (2022) and Cheng et al (2023) could be due to the sample sizes

(79 and 100, respectively), study design, or may simply point back to the complexities and individual variability of this matter (Sachs et al, 2016).

As an autistic person, I can relate to the later-life development of emotional processing described within the literature. As reminded by Greenspon and Montanaro (2022), not all autistic (or otherwise neurodivergent) vocal students will have impairment in this area. That said, many of the neurodivergent singers I work with seem to be affected in their emotional processing and pitching. By now understanding more clearly the reason for this, I can more appropriately and effectively address their specific training needs within my teaching practice.

The Greenspon and Montanaro (2022) study holds some similarities to the Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) study as both explore emotions in singing in a neutral emotional state as well as expressing anger, happiness/joy and sadness. Both aim to cover a wide variety of emotions, with Greenspon and Montanaro (2022) adding disgust and fear, whereas, Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) include tenderness. The activation level of the emotion was found to be more accurately distinguishable than the specific emotion (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023). From this, one may consider training to express the differences between high and low emotional activation as a possible strategy to improve singers' perceived expressivity. I see potential in this strategy working for some students I train, including some who are neurodivergent, where having to display one specific emotion can prove more challenging.

Core Vocal Pedagogy Approaches

Upon this current neuropsychology view of emotional processing and expression, we will consider the three main pedagogical approaches found within the literature for teaching emotional expression to singers; mental imagery (Fields, 1972/2019), acoustic parameters (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023) and embodiment (Juntunen, Arlin and Liira, 2023).

Mental Imagery

Victor Fields (1972/2019) was a key figure in the development of imagery-based voice pedagogy from the historic bel canto tradition (Kennedy-Dygas, 2001) to address the lack of science behind the approach (Rooney, 2016). Central to the approach of Fields (1972/2019) is the belief that a mental image has to precede a singing action due to sung expression being directed by a singer's ability to visualise and imagine it, with responsibility put on the

singing teacher to instruct towards clear mental images. The perceived and desired genuineness of emotionally expressive singing, rather than singing perceived as too technical or contrived, is stated to be an illusion we seek but, in actuality, is the result of successful, imagery-initiated, habit-forming to the point of reaching unconscious execution in singing (Fields, 1972/2019). He also mentions the innate human instinct to express through the voice, through cries relating to our needs, or exclamations of joy or surprise (Fields, 1972/2019). This correlates strongly with the primal sound approach of Chalfin (2017) as a means of connecting to the emotive groundings for singing through known, instinctive sounds. This contributes to Field's core belief that we are to sing to communicate something more than a sound or tone and develop a "singing personality" (Fields, 1972/2019, p.70), which would likely be considered under the umbrella of artistry in today's language (Hughes, 2017).

Collectively, he promotes singing teachers to use the four sequential principles of nurturing mental imagery, promoting good habit-forming, leading to freedom of expression, while encouraging a joyful approach (Fields, 1972/2019). In this approach, a systematic teaching method is valued with a belief that putting conscious thought directly towards the behaviour of the vocal tract only leads to detrimental muscular participation within the vocal mechanism Fields (1972/2019). However, his views in this respect represent outdated voice pedagogy, with LoVetri (2013) identifying this avoidance of interfering with the throat as part of old pedagogy, in contrast to the newer, prominent strain of functional training in vocal teaching, which aims to gradually train the physical and sound components together. In caution to the implementation of this mental imagery-based method, the earlier comment of Chapman (2016) is relevant: that imagery must be taught in a science-informed and skilfull way to be of use to developing emotional expression in the singer. That said, it has been reported that 90% of singing teachers (including teachers of contemporary voice) use imagery at least sometimes (Jaber, 2020), with well-respected CCM singing teachers Seth Riggs (Rooney, 2016) and Lisa Popeil (Benson, 2020) reporting it to be useful for some singers. However, the exclusive imagery approach of Fields (1972/2019) draws a divide with those who apply it non-exclusively, and also stands in contrast with other more recent approaches that focus on changing acoustic parameters, as in Aean et al (2021) and Hakanpää (2022), which will be discussed shortly.

Regarding the fourth and final principle from Fields (1972/2019), a joyful and encouraging approach from the teacher is seen to support the singer to experience enjoyment and openness towards the activities of voice training, which enables better learning and results with greater freedom displayed in their vocal performance. This phenomenon may be further

explained by the more recent Polyvagal Theory, first shared in 1994, which indicates that when we feel consistently safe and supported in an environment, it puts our nervous system in the right mode for learning Porges (2025). This also ties in with Hakanpää (2022), who acknowledges that stress affects phonation. Together, these considerations from Porges (2025) and Hakanpää (2022) could also suggest that vocal students experiencing high stress levels would benefit from stress management strategies.

In practice, I have found that the imagery approach does not work for every singer. Therefore, the main point one may disagree with Fields (1972/2019) is his belief that this is the only approach that will yield results. From the evidence presented, contemporary singing teachers and pedagogues are more likely to have a non-exclusive inclusion of imagery usage in their teaching strategies (Rooney, 2016; Benson, 2020; Jaber, 2020), which is where I would place myself. However, I do concur with the importance of an encouraging environment and teaching approach for the well-being of the student and the good of their development (Bandura, 1997; González, Blanco-Piñeiro and Díaz-Pereira, 2018). Also, although the mental imagery approach is older, I see it as having value and a positive impact for some singers I train.

Acoustic Parameters

A contrasting approach to that of mental imagery is adjusting acoustic parameters, which Hakanpää (2022) describe as an engineer's way to reach emotionally expressive singing for the minority of vocal students who cannot seem to engage with the tonally visualised and emotionally imagined route. This acknowledgement makes it of interest to my quest of helping singers who find it harder to tap into emotion when singing through other methods, especially as Hakanpää (2022) see their strategic, vocal aesthetic-adjusting method as purposed towards getting the meaning through to the audience. Collaboratively, Hakanpää has been a researcher in recent years alongside Waaramaa and Laukkanen, who are collectively associated with speech and singing at Tampere University (2025). Much of their co-authored work focuses on emotion in contemporary commercial singing through an acoustic parameters approach (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2018; Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023), and identifying differences between contemporary commercial and classical singing (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2019).

The acoustic parameters approach is achieved from the understanding of how voice quality changes occur to aid emotional expression and the recognition of such, with the Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2019) mixed-methods multi-study showing a higher level of

correct emotion recognition in PM and other contemporary singing styles compared to singing in a Western Classical style. The result of the overall study was that this model of exploring voice quality changes improved emotional communication when delivered in vocal training.

An example of a branded method that embraces an acoustic parameters approach is Sadolin's Complete Vocal Technique (Aean et al, 2021), which identifies 5 parameters (including sound colouring) that change vocal timbre and the physiological adjustments that are needed to create each one (such as changing larynx position and widening or narrowing areas of the vocal tract for sound colouring). This requires a high level of aural and perceptive skill on the part of the singing teacher and is done on the understanding that timbre serves expressivity and adaptation to the style being sung (Aean et al, 2021). It is worth noting that this study was done based on a published method of Sadolin and with her involvement as one of the researchers (Aean et al, 2021), with potential towards bias to not discredit the method. The Aean et al (2021) study on contemporary commercial singers found that male singers had a measurably larger range of vocal timbre qualities than females. This alone does not tell the whole story, as Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2018) found that more people correctly recognise the emotions of female contemporary commercial singers. Together, this suggests there is more to a singer conveying emotion, as perceived by the listener, than simply using a wide variety of timbres.

Whereas Fields (1972/2019) deemed his imagery-based approach to be imperative to authentic expression, Coutinho, Scherer, and Dikken (2019) venture that it is conceivable that mechanical vocal adjustments to produce expression may result in a quantifiable measure of emotion experienced by the singer. This implies that what produces an emotional vocal (as it is experienced by the singer and perceived as genuine by the audience) is not fixed to one single method, with Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) noting that the study of emotional expressivity in singing is multifaceted and complex.

Compared to the 5 parameters covered in Aean et al (2021), Hakanpää (2022) have further demonstrated the complexity of expression through their ambitious studies using larger numbers of acoustic parameters for the singing voice, including (non-exhaustively):

- fundamental frequency (pitch),
- sound pressure level (loudness),
- sound balance (spread of harmonics),
- harmonics to noise ratio (sound clarity),

- formant frequencies (timbre),
- jitter and shimmer (two types of timbral roughness),
- jitter and shimmer (timbre roughness),
- and attack, sustain and release (amplitude at points in the sound).

Upon testing their developed training method on Finnish acting students, Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) found the primary parameter relating to emotions is the sound pressure level (loudness).

Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) tested the acoustic parameters method in training singers to express neutral, joy, tenderness, sadness and anger. Compared to the key literature for the other two core pedagogical approaches identified (Fields, 1972/2019; Juntunen, Arlin and Liira, 2023), greater depth is shared about the teaching method for the acoustic parameters approach (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023). This gives it firmer grounding in science and makes it easier to apply more effectively into teaching practice. As an example of the described differences between emotions, joy tended to be louder and feature more adducted phonation, simultaneous onset, jaw space and lip spread, and a cleaner, brighter tone, whereas tenderness tended to be quieter with less adducted phonation, a lengthened vocal tract, and softer cheeks, creating a softer tone overall Hakanpää (2022).

The teaching method of Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) includes body tension release, movement while singing, breathing patterns, drills for adjusting loudness, articulation and timbre. The latter is done through several controls such as tongue position, use of the range from breathy to pressed phonation, and the amount of jaw space (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023). The studied application of this method found that vocal training targeting these varied parameters increased emotional recognition in singing, meaning this training can help singers with their emotional expression (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023). The activation level (whether high like in anger or low like in tenderness) of the intended emotions was correctly perceived at a higher rate than the specific emotion, but there was a lower overall correct-perception rate of individual emotions compared to speech-based studies, despite similarities found between emotions in speech and singing (Scherer et al., 2013). This may be explained by the greater restrictions of singing, such as fixed pitch, rhythm and tempo, and a need to balance the emotions expressed with a sound that is of high vocal quality and fits the genre (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023). Though considered an effective method, Hakanpää,

Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2023) state it is non-exclusive to other methods, with existing methods (including mental imagery) being able to be applied by the same vocal students.

A connection between the acoustic and head movement cues of singers was made by Livingstone and Palmer (2016) who found a relationship between the fundamental pitch and the movements of the head, though this relationship lessened in singing compared to speech. Interestingly, in silent video recordings of singers the watchers were able to identify the emotion intended (between happy, sad and neutral) at similar levels recorded in emotional singing and speech studies (Juslin and Laukka, 2016; Livingstone et al., 2015; Livingstone and Palmer, 2016). Similarly, Hakanpää (2022) mentions the universality of core emotions being shown through facial expressions. These findings suggest that singers are not solely relying on sound production for the audience to perceive an emotion from them, as visual expression – as in the case of head movement – may be effective too, with larger movements tending to correspond to higher activation levels of emotion (Livingstone and Palmer, 2016). Therefore, the use of head movements and facial expressions may be one way of expressing different emotional activation levels (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023), which was earlier identified as a potential strategy for enhancing the emotional expression of singers.

Embodiment

Meier et al (2012) describe embodiment as a psychological theory that assumes cognitions (thoughts, emotions and behaviours) are built upon our sensory and bodily experiences, as each part of the person is integrated as a whole. Embodiment applied as an approach to teaching emotionally expressive singing has been researched by Juntunen, Arlin and Liira (2023), with gesture, inner and experiential awareness, and body movement being used as part of a whole-singer viewpoint to reach a freedom of expression in the voice. This pedagogical view opposes that of Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2018, 2019, 2023), as Juntunen, Arlin and Liira (2023) argue for vocal pedagogy to be based on unlocking core expressive elements within the singer as a whole rather than influencing the sound itself or through imitation. One method within this embodiment approach is the use of posture and gesture, on the understanding of it being free from predetermined ideas to freely see what meaning comes out (Juntunen, Arlin and Liira, 2023). One point of common ground between Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen (2018, 2019, 2023) and Juntunen, Arlin and Liira (2023) is regarding facial expressions promoting certain emotions. Similarly, Greenspon and Montanaro (2022) promote the link between vocal cues and facial and physical cues.

Embodied cognition is a theory that proposes how embodiment works, with the body and environment believed to interact strongly with the cognitive process, meaning singing is a complex multimodal sensorimotor activity Jiang and Wu (2025). When applied to vocal training, two insights they include are: techniques centred on moving the body enhance precision and expression, and the use of technology (such as software to visualise pitch or tone) is expanding, particularly with the younger generation, though in some cases it could interrupt necessary cognitive processes or create tensions in the body Jiang and Wu (2025).

Regarding the use of this type of technology, as pitch and emotional expression are connected (Schelinski and von Kriegstein, 2019; Cheng et al, 2023), I would argue, from my teaching experience, that visual software representing pitch is useful for gaining a different tangible viewpoint and for gross motor control. In my experience, it is when it is applied towards making smaller changes, such as in fine motor control, that it seems to be more likely to lead to excess body tension or a sound that is perceived as overly technical rather than expressive, which Fields (1972/2019) adamantly opposed. I agree that singing involves complex interactions with the person, from movements, to the mind, to sensory feedback, to emotional regulation (Jiang and Wu, 2025). However, my viewpoint is that because each area influences the other, having multiple places or ways to create influence and change across the whole is useful for each unique singer. Therefore, rather than avoiding technological interventions for fear or creating tensions, it can be the way in to build skill and accuracy for some singers. Jiang and Wu (2025) do recognise the individual variability within each singer, which I agree with, and recommend this as an area for further research.

The embodiment approach involves greater emphasis on somatic works than the other two core pedagogical approaches considered, with the Feldenkrais Method (FM) being one that can be applied in service to the overarching embodiment principles (Paparo, 2022). Paparo (2022) found that applying the FM resulted in improved body mapping and movement, and singing awareness and adaptability. Participants found individual benefits through this self-discovery approach and generally developed greater ease in vocal production and authenticity in emotional expression through improved connection and use of their bodies as well as increased self-belief (Paparo, 2022). This fits with the existing literature of FM being helpful to singers, including refining their senses through bodywork and working positively with their nervous system to reach more freedom (Grant, 2014; Paparo, 2021). Therefore, strategies such as this that tune a singer into their bodies and promote positive self-belief may be of benefit.

The exploration of the three main approaches covered is limited by what is available in current research, with known gaps and a lack of CCM vocal pedagogy research (Bartlett, 2014). Research gaps include the current, prominent, functional training approach mentioned by LoVetri (2013) that lacks adequate methodical and scientific coverage in the literature. This is an area recommended for future research.

Examples and Success Measures of Emotive Singing in Popular Music

In PM, it is the listener, or audience, that judges the success of whether a singer truly expresses emotive singing that they can connect to (Chalfin, 2017; Noble, 2022), with an emphasis on achieving what is felt as expressive authenticity being expected of performing singers (Bicknell, 2005; Philips-Hutton, 2018). Philips-Hutton (2018) points out that there are social and style implications as to what is deemed authentic and a desired singing persona that rings true, with a range of personas being possible to be accepted from each singer, such as in the case of the creative reinventions of the well-known pop music artist Lady Gaga to the humbler, simpler approach of the lesser-known indie singer-songwriter William Fitzsimmons. Bicknell (2005) concurs that there are limits to what an audience will accept as authentic from an ever artistically evolving singer. In the case of PM, it is important to consider the impact of music production on the expression of a singer through a song in both the live and studio environment, for example, Philips-Hutton (2018) ventures that close-miking for quiet, whispered singing adds to the intimate feel. Also, for more advanced, professional performers, the use of visual imagery and multi-sensory experience is often employed to enhance the perception of the performance (Philips-Hutton, 2018).

One of the influential music artists Philips-Hutton (2018) highlights as exemplifying emotional expression well is Alanis Morissette, who is the sole subject of Noble (2022). Noble (2022) describes Alanis Morissette's range of expression as being led by her lyrics and, perhaps more so, her varied and artistic vocalisation, presenting her highly regarded album *Jagged Little Pill* as evidence of a wide audience perceiving her vocal expression and persona as authentic. Believing a wide variety of voice qualities to be a way of expressing different emotions, Noble (2022) suggests her use of yodelling between chest and head voice to express a loss of control and pursuing control (respectively), and the varied effects of whispers, creak, laughing, talking and wailing being used within her vocal palette. Some of this collection of stylistic vocal effects could potentially demonstrate the use of primal sound (Chalfin, 2017), to be considered shortly. Additionally, there is a variety of vocal parameters on display in these options, such as breathy to pressed, as explored in Hakanpää (2022). As a further example, Morissette is said by Noble (2022) to lean into belting to express anger,

which is deemed a high activation emotion with a more adducted vocal production (Hakanpää, 2022). That said, Bicknell (2005) suggests the sung melody, above the lyric, must contain an emotional mood to communicate effectively, while holding the tension between the level and means of expression with the optimal function of the voice, as they disrupt each other. This links back to the earlier comment of Bartlett and Naismith (2020) regarding the singing teacher's role in helping the singer balance the expressivity and vocal function.

Whether the singers I am training are singer-songwriters (as many PM singers are), as in the above examples, or they are singing covers, Chalfin (2017) deems connection with the audience to be the end goal for singers through interpretation of the lyric and emotional intention of the song, and use of primal sound, posture and gesture to express this. His primal sound approach for contemporary singers, though not covered in depth in the available literature, is intended to result in a more authentic, emotionally-connected sound based on the singer using what he deems to be innate vocal set-ups such as sigh, whisper, whine, cry, and yell (Chalfin, 2017). Chandler (2020), another well-known vocal coach, has voiced finding the primal sound approach useful in her teaching practice. Hakanpää (2022) states that our emotions affect the vocal system, from breathing to vocal tract muscles, causing a change in voice quality, which is what is assumed in primal sound (Chalfin, 2017). However, the idea of primal sound truly being emotionally authentic in the way Chalfin (2017) describes is in doubt due to the science that explains that emotion in singing, as it is rehearsed and repeated, it is not spontaneous and authentic in the same way that our reactions to stimulus in day-to-day life can be (Williams and Stevens, 1972; Hakanpää, 2022). On this subject, Juslin, Laukka and Bänziger (2018) distinguished differences in the acoustic and perceived analysis of posed versus spontaneous emotional voicing, with spontaneous being more nuanced and potentially perceived as less intense in emotion, yet felt as more natural, with our everyday vocal expressions proposed to be a mix of the two.

For my professional practice, remembering the end goal of audience connection for performing singers (Chalfin, 2017; Noble, 2022) is important within the vocal studio to avoid becoming too insular during training, and considering the range of stylistic vocal effects and expressive colours of the voice that are possible as in Noble (2022) can be beneficial, and could potentially be explored through mimicry (Hughes, 2017), primal sound (Chalfin, 2017) or acoustic parameter changes (Hakanpää, 2022) for singers to expand their vocal palette of expression. In my experience, working on what the song is about and the main emotions to express (Chalfin, 2017) can be effective for some vocal students who do not do this instinctively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study increased my understanding of emotional expression in PM singing by bringing awareness of the complexities of the topic (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023) and the personal diversity due to each individual's neurology (Sachs et al, 2016), with the noted link between pitch perception and emotional perception and reproduction (Cheng et al, 2023) being particularly intriguing.

Through the literature, I gained a stronger justification of some strategies that may encourage emotion in singing that already exist in my practice, such as:

- vocal mimicry to aid artistic choices (Hughes, 2017),
- skillful use of imagery (Fields 1972/2019; Chapman, 2016),
- use of physical cues (including facial expression and head movement) (Livingstone and Palmer, 2016; Juntunen, Arlin and Liira, 2023),
- body movement, positioning and connection (Paparo, 2022; Juntunen, Arlin and Liira, 2023),
- software to visualise pitch or tone (Jiang and Wu, 2025),
- and song interpretation and primal sounds (such as yell or whine) (Chalfin, 2017).

Additionally, I gained an array of possible strategies from the literature to explore further in my teacher practice, including:

- emotional intents in scales (Sun, 2024),
- train both pitch and emotional recognition and replication (Cheng et al, 2023),
- expressing high and low emotional activation (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023),
- adjusting more acoustic parameters (such movements of the tongue and larynx) to affect loudness and timbre (Hakanpää, 2022),
- and increased emphasis on stylistic vocal effects (such as yodels and creak) (Bicknell, 2005).

Of these, the dual-training of pitch and emotion (Cheng et al, 2023), exploring emotional activation levels (Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2023), and using an increased number of parameters to adjust perceived acoustic voice quality (Hakanpää, 2022) are the three key strategies I intend to implement with some students to be able to assess their efficacy in action. These selections have been made with consideration of the individual needs and strengths of current vocal students I train who are seeking to improve their emotional expression. Further suggestions, beyond those able to be implemented in the

vocal studio, could be for vocal students to consider: acting training (Livingstone, Choi and Russo, 2014), stress management (Hakanpää, 2022), and music production and multimedia choices for higher-level performers (Philips-Hutton, 2018).

All the aforementioned strategies are likely to be most effective when done in an encouraging learning environment (Fields 1972/2019; Porges, 2025) using methods appropriate to the individual singer that nurture self-belief (Grant, 2014; Paparo, 2021). Therefore, I seek to apply the identified strategies to my professional practice with this firmly in mind.

Critical Reflection

On reflection, I consider the largest change to my learning journey through this assignment was being encouraged toward greater independence than before, such as having the choice of how frequently to book tutorials with the tutor for this module. Given I am more than halfway into the timeline of my Master's study, I took this as a challenge to trust the learning I have gained through the prior modules and the understanding I now have of my personal learning process, with a general pattern of ups and downs forming, as a guide to allow myself to move through this assignment with that greater independence and make adjustments along the way. This brings me in line with the view of the key 20th Century figure Dewey (1993) on reflection, that it is a type of problem solving (Hatton and Smith, 1995). To exemplify some of the reflections I have made during my learning journey through this module, I have selected to demonstrate how I have met my three expected learning outcomes by using the reflection model of Smyth (1989) due to its applicability to teaching and its simple 4-part structure: describe, inform, confront and reconstruct.

Reflection on Learning Outcome 1:

Learning Outcome: To develop skills to conduct a higher-quality, methodical literature review.

Describe: What did I do?

I followed a more extensive and rigorous search strategy and methodology (Liberati et al, 2009; Xiao and Watson, 2017), resulting in gathering, reading and drawing from a larger volume of papers and other resources than in the previous literature reviews I conducted.

Inform: What does it mean?

I found the amount of information there was to process through this more rigorous methodology to be overwhelming at times, and it was hard to know how to progress through to identifying parts of the data to move forward with. Overall, it took me a larger amount of time to gradually work through the literature, and it was done with more stops and starts due to dealing with the overwhelm.

Confront: How did I come to be like this?

It did not surprise me that I found this challenging, as I had noticed in previous modules that reaching a state of overwhelm is a relatively common experience. This exemplifies my assumption that I must make large improvements to be shown to be progressing. However, this situation allowed me to consider that perhaps smaller, moderate developments to my search strategy and methodological approach at a time are sufficient to be manageable whilst retaining a degree of growth to meet my personal development goal in this area.

Reconstruct: What do my practices say about my assumptions, values and beliefs?

Under similar circumstances, I recognise that it is normal for me to sometimes feel overwhelmed, and on those occasions in future, I intend to reset my expectations on the scale of the work needed. Likely, I will need to remind myself that making fewer or smaller additions or developments to improve my research practice at a time will likely help me reduce or move through any overwhelm. Therefore, I will be more likely to keep progressing gradually with improved consistency.

Reflection on Learning Outcome 2:

Learning Outcome: To develop the cognitive and intellectual component of my work, as suggested by feedback from the previous module.

Describe: What did I do?

I sought to make more connections between sources and increase the critical evaluation (Winter, 2023) included compared to my prior literature reviews, to seek to demonstrate better cognitive and intellectual skills.

Inform: What does it mean?

This meant seeking to notice more connections, similarities and contrasts between a larger volume of sources I read, to develop what I can get out of the literature.

Confront: How did I come to be like this?

This being an area for development highlights a general tendency towards a preference towards description over judgement, with an openness to multiple teaching methods and strategies having validity and a level of avoidance of rejecting others' ideas. It may also relate to my slower cognitive processing with causes producing connections and critiques to take me longer than average to achieve.

Reconstruct: What do my practices say about my assumptions, values and beliefs?

Firstly, this suggests that I value listening to and finding at least some validity from a wide variety of pedagogues, professionals and researchers. Secondly, this reminds me to be patient with and gracious to myself and not expect more than the best I can achieve within the timeframe and point of study.

Reflection on Learning Outcome 3:

Learning Outcome: To bring learnings and relevant strategies from this study into my teaching practice to benefit the PM singers I work with.

Describe: What did I do?

Through the process of producing the literature review, I was able to gain justification for some of the teaching strategies already embedded in my professional practice and select further actionable strategies to bring into my professional practice to help singers with expressivity, from making acoustic adjustments (Hakanpää, 2022) to developing pitch alongside emotion (Cheng et al, 2023).

Inform: What does it mean?

I was able to consider a large volume of options and deduce a variety of strategies that I believe, from what the research says, may improve my teaching practice, as well as share from my prior experience of implementing some. This means my existing and newer expressive singing teaching strategies are more firmly understood and rooted in what I see as a healthy balance of the scientific and working practice.

Confront: How did I come to be like this?

Despite being relatively academically capable, my preference from a young age has been towards learning that is able to be applied quickly for positive impact on and meaning to pursuits I am committed towards. The first time this became obvious was many years ago

when I opted to do a music workshop delivery apprenticeship rather than a music degree at the expected point after A Levels.

Reconstruct: What do my practices say about my assumptions, values and beliefs?

This speaks to how I value knowledge that holds usefulness and applicability over knowledge for the sake of knowledge in all areas of my life, including my approach to teaching singing. For me, this guides me in deciphering what is worth my attention and what is not, which is particularly useful when studying alongside a full work and personal life.

Overall, I am proud of the progress I have made to meet my learning outcomes through this study and looking forward to continuing to learn and develop further, for the good of my professional work in offering my vocal students the best service I can.

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