

Acting through song in musical theatre: complementary and contrary techniques for
acting and singing

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Research Question

Are acting techniques complementary or contrary to singing techniques for the musical theatre performer when acting through song?

Component 1

Introduction (Rationale)

Musical theatre (MT) requires performers to synthesise dancing, acting, and singing simultaneously and with precision (Glasheen, 2017; Moore, 2024). These multi-disciplinary performers are called 'triple threats' (TTs) (Dunbar, 2014). From a practice perspective, collaboration with performers has involved engagement with the quality standards of modern MT (Morton, 2014). From an insider researcher perspective, one area of interest is how TTs integrate the disciplines with a focus on singing. Drawing on practice-based observations, TTs often focus on the integration of singing and dancing but acting is added at the end, even though it is integral to the performance. Because MT performers are expected to express emotion through believable and identifiable characters (Cuny, 2022), it may be beneficial to integrate acting and singing techniques. Thus, the research question reflects the author's positionality as both a voice professional and researcher (Forbes, 2024). Acting through song (ATS) presents challenges when training TTs which affect both the student and the voice professional (Cuny, 2018; Morgan, 2025). The synergy or conflict of singing and acting techniques may affect ATS which will be explored in this literature review.

Planned Programme of Study

Context

The MT performer is often asked to sing, act, and dance concurrently (Dunbar, 2014); however, sometimes a musical number does not include choreography and relies on storytelling via a song which is a tenet of MT (Kafoa, 2025). Acting and singing in parallel is known as ATS. ATS differs from acting (spoken rather than sung) as alluded to by Balk (1985, p. 24):

...it is no denigration of acting classes to say that they are very often of little benefit to the singing actor, for they deal with the rules of theater, not the rules of music-theater, and singers may emerge from them even more confused about the problems of singing-acting.

Referring to opera, Balk (1985) goes on to posit that both music and theatre exist on a stylistic continuum but that the two disciplines move at a different rate causing a complex dissonance. Extending Balk's singer-actor to include MT performers, a TT who is acting

through song may require alignment of the two disciplines in order to prepare and perform a song effectively.

Most practitioner literature on ATS originates in the Stanislavskian acting method (Dunbar, 2016; Morgan, 2025) because his interest in music informed his theatrical innovation and was co-equal with theatre in his creative vision (Carnicke and Rosen, 2013). Therefore, modern practitioners, from acting pedagogues such as Meisner, Laban, Michael Chekov, and Grotowski (Harvard, 2013; Deer and Dal Vera, 2021; Morgan, 2025) to ATS practitioners, Burgess and Skilbeck, Ostwald, Moore and Bergman, Deer and Dal Vera, and Harvard (Dunbar, 2016) have derived their methodologies from Stanislavski. While this paper is not a systematic review of practitioner literature, the genesis of modern ATS methodologies is important because there is a mind-body connection in Stanislavski's 'system' (Moseley, 2013) which has been adopted by modern ATS pedagogues and could lead to the integration of singing and acting.

Aims and Objectives

This review aims to explore a selection of the synergies and conflicts between acting and singing and what strategies voice professionals and performers might use to synergise them for ATS.

Aims

- To gain knowledge of Stanislavskian derived acting techniques in their historical and present-day context, particularly the psychophysical work of his later period (Dunbar, 2016).
- To better understand how performers learn music and text and if there is intersectionality between them.
- To examine the differences between breathing for acting and singing and how they are relevant in the voice studio.
- To explore how emotional expression relates to ATS and how to integrate it into ATS pedagogy in the voice studio.
- To create a foundation for Module 6 of this MA programme by researching techniques which can assist the TT to perform with more ease and beauty.

Objectives

- To conduct a narrative literature review which explores how acting and singing techniques are complementary and contrary.

- To determine, through peer-reviewed and practitioner literature, how best to synthesise acting and singing techniques for the enhancement of ATS.
- To deepen knowledge of literature review methodology and understand how to conduct a narrative literature review in an under-represented area of study.
- To critically reflect on gaps in understanding of acting techniques and on the application of those techniques in the studio.

Personal Learning Outcomes

- To enhance coaching and musical director (MD) practices by incorporating researched ATS techniques.
- To elevate performances as a TT through better understanding of acting and ATS pedagogy.
- To prepare for further primary research in MT performance.
- To improve organisational and time-management skills to produce a comprehensive literature review.
- To continue development as a qualitative insider researcher in the emerging field of MT studies.

Timeline

Module 4						August 2025					September 2025					September 2025					November 2025					November 2025					November 2025					December 2025					January 2026				
						MM_WEEK 3					MM_WEEK 2					MM_WEEK 3					MM_WEEK 1					MM_WEEK 3					MM_WEEK 4					MM_WEEK 2					MM_WEEK 2				
						YY_WEEK 34					YY_WEEK 37					YY_WEEK 38					YY_WEEK 45					YY_WEEK 47					YY_WEEK 48					YY_WEEK 50					YY_WEEK 2				
WBS	Task	Start	Due Date	% Complete	Status	18	19	20	21	22	8	9	10	11	12	15	16	17	18	19	3	4	5	6	7	17	18	19	20	21	24	25	26	27	28	8	9	10	11	12	5	6	7	8	
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1.1.0	Select Topic	18-Aug-2025	25-Aug-2025	100%	Complete																																								
1.2.0	Gantt Chart Set up	18-Aug-2025	02-Sep-2025	100%	Complete																																								
1.3.0	Reflexive Journal Set Up	18-Aug-2025	07-Sep-2025	100%	Complete																																								
1.4.0	Search Terms Log Set Up	18-Aug-2025	15-Sep-2025	100%	Complete																																								
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2.1.0	Introduction	03-Nov-2025	17-Nov-2025	100%	Complete																																								
2.2.0	Planned Programmne of Study	03-Nov-2025	17-Nov-2025	100%	Complete																																								
2.3.0	Methodology	03-Nov-2025	17-Nov-2025	100%	Complete																																								
3.0.0		COMPONENT 2																																											
3.1.0	Literature Review	10-Nov-2025	30-Nov-2025	100%	Complete																																								
3.2.0	Critical Reflection	10-Nov-2025	30-Nov-2025	100%	Complete																																								
4.0.0		ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES AND MILESTONES																																											
4.1.0	Draft	08-Dec-2025	08-Dec-2025	100%	Complete																																								
4.2.0	Assignment Deadline	05-Jan-26	05-Jan-26	100%																																									

Methodology

Research Question

This literature review adopts research values which reflect a “qualitative sensibility” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 6) including an epistemological orientation toward nuanced understanding that accommodates complexity and contradiction (Braun and Clarke, 2021) and an ontology that recognises subjective realities (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012; Scott, 2024). The research question reflects these values by highlighting both the complementary and contrary elements of singing and acting techniques in ATS. The impetus for the literature review originated in Module 3 of this MA programme. Primary research data on the experience of TT’s while singing, dancing, and acting simultaneously suggested that acting through song enhanced performance but is often an afterthought (Descher, 2025). Within coaching practice, ATS is used and is observed to enhance performance; however, an understanding of how it works needs development. Using this theme and an iterative process of research and reading (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013), the research question developed, moving from a broad topic to a specific question (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019) (Appendix 1). Following the recommendations of Lipowski (2008) to consider personal experiences and problem solving and of Braun and Clarke (2021) to consider bias and reflexivity (the practice of evaluating research methods and motivations) for practitioner-researchers when crafting the research question will align the study with the stated research values.

Type of Review

The aim of this review will be to connect interdisciplinary fields and synthesise applied practice with academic depth (Winter, 2023). Therefore, a selective narrative review was chosen because it allows freedom to tell the story presented in the data (Grant and Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2021). A narrative review, rather than systematic or rapid reviews, was selected because of time constraints (Winter, 2023) and the lack of peer-reviewed literature available on ATS creating an inability to adhere to strict inclusion criteria (Snyder, 2019). Thus, the freedom of a narrative review is more applicable to the research question. To fulfil the requirements of this paper and by using Cooper’s (1988) Taxonomy (Figure 1), the focus will be on practice and how to address that practice not meeting a need (Randolph, 2009), which relates directly to positionality as an insider-researcher. In addition, this paper may address a diverse, potentially non-academic audience, so the narrative review allows dissemination of knowledge without assuming expertise in the subject or methodologies (Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2006; Onwuegbuzie, 2018; Winter, 2023). While the narrative review has some gaps in rigour and the potential for bias (Winter, 2023), it is

important to recognize subjectivity as a valuable component of a qualitative approach (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Figure 1

Characteristic	Categories
Focus	Research outcomes Research methods Theories Practices or applications
Goal	Integration (a) Generalization (b) Conflict resolution (c) Linguistic bridge-building Criticism Identification of central issues
Perspective	Neutral representation Espousal of position
Coverage	Exhaustive Exhaustive with selective citation Representative Central or pivotal
Organization	Historical Conceptual Methodological
Audience	Specialized scholars General scholars Practitioners or policymakers General public

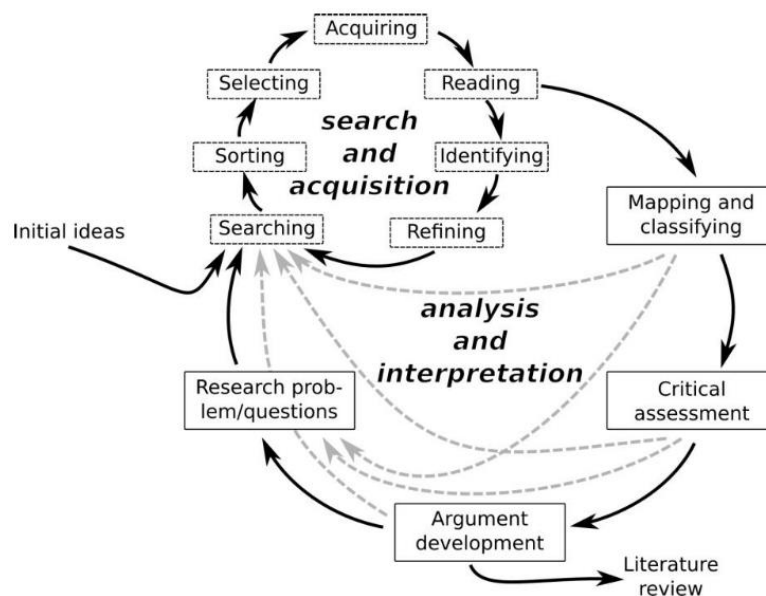
Cooper's Taxonomy of Literature Reviews (Randolph, 2009)

Literature

The Hermeneutic Framework

Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) posit that engaging with literature is more than a routine requirement; it is a process of intellectual growth, therefore, the need to explore and identify relevant sources can arise at different stages of research. Consequently, conducting a literature review is an iterative and interactive procedure aimed at achieving saturation of comprehension (Combs, Bustamante and Onwuegbuzie, 2010; Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). To achieve this, the hermeneutic framework (Figure 2) will be used for the literature review.

Figure 2



A hermeneutic framework for the literature review (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014)

Searches

A systematic search (Appendix 2) added rigour by providing explicit and reproducible results (Booth, 2016).

Search terms:

- the singing actor
- acting through song
- triple threat acting
- triple threat singing
- MT singing
- MT acting

Database searches:

- University of Wales Trinity St. David Library
- Google Scholar
- Taylor and Francis database
- MT-specific journals

Filters:

- 'exact match'
- 'peer-reviewed'
- 'articles'
- 'exact phrase'
- 'English'

The searches led to two articles, Dunbar (2016) and Morgan (2025), which served as 'pearls' (Schlosser *et al.*, 2006) and provided the topics for exploration. From here, citation chaining helped identify additional relevant literature (Schlosser *et al.*, 2006). MT research is an emerging field of study, therefore there is a dearth of peer-reviewed literature (Curtis, 2019; Flynn, 2022a; Thomas and Alexander, 2025). For this reason, a need for wider inclusion/exclusion criteria is anticipated and will include any article from the previous 20 years about the intersection acting and singing techniques.

Practitioner Literature

Practitioner literature is expected to be included in this review due to the scarcity of peer-reviewed literature (Curtis, 2019; Flynn, 2022a; Thomas and Alexander, 2025) and to augment sources. A practice as research literature review necessitates an interdisciplinary perspective as well as the incorporation of diverse sources beyond peer-reviewed publications (Nelson, 2013; Winter, 2023). While quality and validity can be compromised in grey literature (Winter, 2023), the review will follow the framework suggested by Kepes *et al.* (2012) where Tier 1 is the most valid and includes published literature including books and book chapters. The practitioner texts referenced in this review are cited in the pearls and other peer-review literature which arguably adds rigour to their inclusion. These practitioner texts may be important for answering the research question and achieving the aims of this literature review.

Component 2

Literature Review

Introduction

TT performers must demonstrate that they can sing, dance, and act simultaneously to excel (Cuny, 2022). In this review, dance is removed from the three disciplines and the focus is on singing and acting. Today's MT singers are expected to demonstrate emotionally engaged acting integrated with specific and varied vocal qualities (Melton, 2007; Cuny, 2018); however, evidence from surveys conducted by LoVetri and Weekly (2003, 2009) indicated that voice teachers are often ill-equipped to provide their students with ATS techniques which are required for MT performance (Cuny, 2018; Morgan, 2025). As a result, TTs are often taught the disciplines in siloes and are expected to integrate them outside of class or rehearsal (Glasheen, 2017), a situation commonly encountered in the rehearsal process. There are no studies to support this, but Melton (2014) noted that although research on integrated teaching methods for the TT disciplines is lacking, this approach would likely benefit students. This review will address some of those gaps by highlighting areas where singing and acting intersect and diverge and how that might apply in the voice studio to provide singers with tools to prepare more authentic performances.

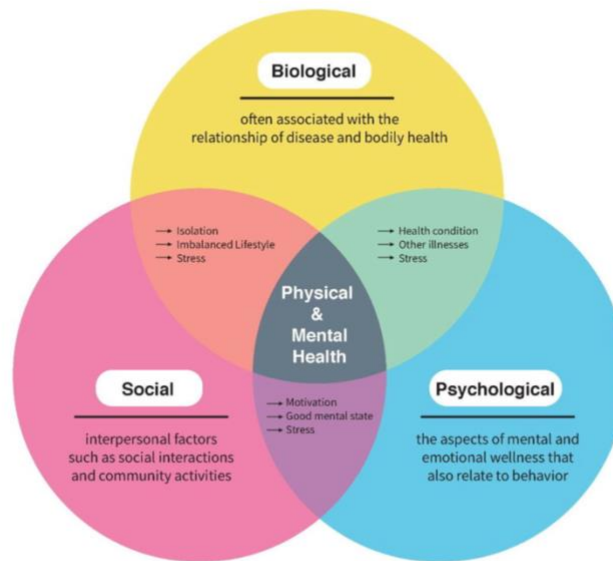
As stated in the planned programme of study, most modern ATS practitioners evolved from the Stanislavskian method (Dunbar, 2016; Morgan, 2025). Therefore, two topics which will be explored in this review were derived from Dunbar's (2016) "Stanislavski's system in musical theatre actor training: anomalies of acting song." It could be argued that Dunbar (2016) has a negative bias toward the synthesis of acting and singing, but his ideas are a solid basis for the topics. Firstly, performing musical text has more constraints than performing spoken text which may affect synchronisation of the disciplines and secondly, breathing is different for singing and speaking which directly affects ATS (Dunbar, 2016). Both topics contain an emotional component so the third topic is derived from Morgan's (2025) study on the authenticity of emotion in MT singers: vocal emotional expression differs in singing and in speech which can affect the physiology of the voice, and consequently, ATS. This primary research project attempts to inform singing teachers how emotions are perceived by the audience in order to teach ATS more effectively (Morgan, 2025). Each topic is tangential to the others and addresses an area of inconsistency between acting and singing which must be ameliorated by the singing-actor to improve the performance. To contextualize the topics for the voice professional, a section on the psychophysical aspects of the Stanislavski system follows.

Stanislavski's Psychophysical Approach in ATS Training

Late in his career, Stanislavski searched for a method which would address obstacles to the concurrent depiction of the interiority of feelings and the exteriority of expression which resulted in the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis where the actor performs a series of physical actions through improvisation (Beck, 2013; Dunbar, 2016). He observed that there is a direct correlation between body and mind whereby the body reacts to emotion and conversely, the body can cause an emotional reaction which is specified by the text (Moseley, 2013). This led to what Carnicke (2009, p. 223) defines as psychophysical or the "mind-body-spirit continuum of experience" accessed through physical behaviours. The psychosocial approach to acting appears to share some commonalities with the biopsychosocial model, a health template which includes biological, psychological, and social elements and is an emerging area of interest for singing pedagogues (Figure 3) (Fancourt, 2017; Dingle et al., 2019). Stephen King, a voice health specialist who advocates for an integrative approach, asserts that singing teachers who purport to use a holistic pedagogy are focusing on the physical aspect of singing which is only one third of the model and that they should be directed toward the other two thirds (Terry, 2021, 10:55). Used in congruence, the psychophysical and biopsychosocial models could provide the voice practitioner with a fully holistic methodology for ATS.

Figure 3

Biopsychosocial (BPS) model



Graphic: Chrystie Tyler



Biopsychosocial Model (Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis Department of Surgery, 2021)

The psychophysical approach to acting aligns to present-day MT training in its emphasis on synchronicity: performers are expected to sing, act, and move/dance simultaneously with authentic emotional expression (Dunbar, 2016). This perspective might explain why most ATS practitioners base their methodology in the Stanislavskian method or in contemporary interpretations of his work (Dunbar, 2016; Morgan, 2025). Although there appears to be little empirical evidence to support the application of the psychophysical to ATS, the practitioner literature is highly credible due to the authors' experience and expertise in MT pedagogy (Nelson, 2013; Winter, 2023). Both Dunbar (2016) and Cuny (2022) identify Merlin's (2014) *The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit* as the modern extension of Stanislavski's mind-body connection which builds on his integrationist ideal and applies it to truthful characterisation in acting. Taylor (2009) applies this ideal to ATS by describing integration in performance as the seamless blending of acting, singing, and dancing to create a coherent story with believable characters. A consequence of integration is the concept of 'organic-ness' in acting (Dunbar, 2016). The term organic can have many definitions as it applies to acting but broadly, it is the synthesis of an actor's training (Dunbar, 2016) which combines impulse, thought, movement, speech, and voice into a unified expression (Gutekunst and Gillet, 2021). While 'organic-ness' is often applied to ATS, it seems too vague to describe ATS,

which requires cogent preparation of the music, text, and movement in order to present the song with convincing characterisation without comprising vocal technique (Dunbar, 2016). In this context, it may be argued that Stanislavski's psychophysical approach underpins ATS training by establishing a relationship between body and mind. This foundation will be examined in the literature review through the exploration of music versus text, breathing, and emotion and how these elements may support the integration of singing and acting. The knowledge and application of these topics in the voice studio could be pivotal to voice professionals who work with TTs.

The Relationship of Words and Music

From the perspective as an MD and MT researcher, one of the key challenges for TTs is integrating the three disciplines: singing, acting and dancing. Many performers focus solely on singing and dancing concurrently (Descher, 2025); however, ATS should be of equal concern for both teachers and performers because acting signifies the internal life of a character (Weaver, 2019). Effectively integrating music and text into a believable character who can tell the story appears to be a challenge which many performers seem to encounter when performing MT. Dunbar (2016, p. 67) acknowledges that musical notation defines sound in terms of precise "durations, rhythms, and pitches" and that these fixed definitions of time and space impose constraints on the singer-actor which are different from those faced by an actor performing only text. Musical elements such as tempo, melody, orchestration, key, and modulation give the performer cues about the text and serve as subtext (Voice Study Centre, 2025, 2:29). The performer can regard the lyrics as explicit and the music, both melody and orchestration, as implicit or the true meaning of the words (Bell and Chicurel, 2008; Deer and Dal Vera, 2021). Moving toward synchronicity, Burgess and Skilbeck (2000) purport that musical expression revolves around the interplay of musical elements; thus, music provides a temporal framework for drama and drama provides music with the ability to tell the story and to develop a character. It is then the performer's responsibility to organise the integration of the disciplines (Burgess and Skilbeck, 2000). This observation seems like a cogent explanation of how ATS coheres and leads to these practitioners' methodologies on how to most effectively achieve the integration of words and music. However, Harvard (2013) contends that the lyric does not always tell the truth and that the music is a clue to the character. This suggests that the coordination of words and music is a complex and multi-faceted undertaking which is dependent on the interpretation of the practitioner.

Practitioner literature offers numerous ways to unite words and music; however, since most are rooted in Stanislavski's psychophysical framework (Dunbar, 2016; Morgan, 2025), it may follow that they are variations on a theme. A comparison of attitudes toward the rehearsal process by prominent practitioners offers a possible indication of their ideology towards words and music. The entire premise of Burgess and Skilbeck's (2000) methodology is how to integrate acting and singing. Their methodology relies on a dynamic and iterative process which moves through four phases:

- character exploration and contextualisation
- technically learning the music
- emotionally connecting the words and music
- improvisation for versatility

(Burgess and Skilbeck, 2000)

These practices appear to align words and music by attributing musicality to words which potentially allows for a more profound communication of emotion. Harvard (2013) rejects vocal display and challenges the performer to treat ATS as a holistic acting task. His rehearsal process consists of intense textual and musical analysis before combining them (Harvard, 2013). Like Harvard (2013), Deer and Dal Vera (2021) instruct the performer to analyse text and music before integrating them. When the song is ready for the synthesis of words and music, they emphasise storytelling and the dynamic nature of the character which they call "the journey of the song" (Deer and Dal Vera, 2021, p.138). Whereas Burgess and Skilbeck (2000) advocate for the integration of words and music early in the rehearsal process, Harvard (2013) and Deer and Dal Vera (2021) propose lengthier multi-step processes thus integration occurs later. The latter practitioners have written their methodologies more recently; consequently, they could be based on developments in the practice of ATS. Other practitioner manuals surveyed follow the same formula with different foci (Table 1). These books appear to delineate text from music placing slightly greater emphasis on one or the other and differing the order of analysis. What is discerned from the practitioners is that words and music seem to be of equal importance in ATS and that focus and order may make little difference since they are trying to achieve the same result: an amalgamation of the two. What does not seem clear are the results. The determination of what is 'good' in MT is subjective (Flynn, 2022a) suggesting a need for more qualitative study. This is evident in arts-based assessment practices which do not have a standard for excellence rather rely on subjective judgements (Mello, 2007; Andrade *et al.*, 2015; Flynn, 2022a). This subjectivity is reflected in how performers and audiences may perceive the success of a performance differently (Cuny, 2022; Morgan, 2025). Likewise, innovations in MT are indicating the addition of disciplines such as dramaturgy (Thornton, 2018) and stage

combat (Reed and Snyder, 2021) which require integration alongside singing, acting, and dancing. The “complete singer-actor” as described by Balk (1985, p. xi) has evolved in the twenty-first century with multi-faceted implications and demands for the ATS teacher who must prepare students for a contemporary MT scene (Cuny, 2018).

Table 1

Practitioner	Title	Summary
Balk (1985)	The complete singer-actor	Embodiment of the character and story through the integration of music and drama.
Melton and Tom (2003)	One voice	Interdisciplinary training with focus on the voice both sung and spoken.
Kayes (2004)	Singing and the actor	Emphasis on vocal technique combined with clarity of the text so that integration creates a compelling performance.
Melton (2007)	Singing in musical theatre	Introduced with a series of interviews with practitioners, a holistic approach to vocalisation for fluid movement between singing and acting.
Streeton and Raymond (2014)	Singing on stage	Monologuing the lyric as text to find dramatic content before integration.
Purdy (2016)	Musical theatre song	Story and character analysis blends with music to find emotional truth.
Moore and Bergman (2016)	Acting the song	Focus on the music without text to uncover dramatic intentions before re-integration.
Allen (2019)	The singer acts, the actor sings	Highlights the importance of storytelling through devised and spoken monologues preceding integration.

Summary of practitioners’ viewpoints on the integration of words and music in MT

In MT practice, the integration of singing and acting, despite the practitioners’ precedence of one over the other, is characteristic of Stanislavski’s psychophysical process (Dunbar, 2016). Ultimately, Dunbar (2016) is sceptical of the MT training literature, questioning the feasibility of acting and singing assimilation and identifying primarily technical (physical) obstacles.

Counterarguments to this scepticism might include:

- The wide dissemination and citation of practitioner literature.
- The ‘cognitive turn’ in acting which refers to cognitive neuroscience and its application to acting methodology (Blair, 2008) and neuroscience as applied to singing which is an emerging branch of voice research (Zarate, 2013). Neuroscience may offer previously unexplored pathways to integration of acting and singing.
- Experience as a voice coach, MD, and performer, using practitioner ATS methodologies in the studio, rehearsal room, and on stage which have resulted in

positive, authentic performance outcomes. It may be unclear how ATS works, but performers appear to integrate singing and acting successfully.

Breathing and the Voice: Singing Versus Acting

In professional practice, when performers consider the three MT disciplines alongside 'the breath', singing and dancing are often at the forefront. Studies by Sliiden, Beck and MacDonald (2017) and Stephens and Wyon (2020) are recent, often cited examples of quantitative research into breathing at the intersection of singing and dancing. However, acting calls for equal consideration as it has its own breathing requirements (Gates, 2022). The 'cognitive turn' in acting, which refers to the application of cognitive neuroscience to acting methodology (Blair, 2008), and emerging neuroscience-informed approaches to singing (Zarate, 2013) may present opportunities for breath intersectionality; however, due to the breadth of this area, it is out of scope for this review. Another area for future exploration tangential to the 'cognitive turn' is the reciprocal relationship of breath and language stemming from the work of acting pedagogues, Patsy Rodenburg and Kristin Linklater (Dunbar, 2016) whose approaches similarly conceive breath as the originating impulse of thought and spoken language (Rodenburg, 1993; Linklater, 2006). One possible reason for the lack of research in this area may reflect the challenges of quantification; the examination of breathing for actors is left largely to practitioners whose study of the acting and singing disciplines and practical experience as teachers lead them to bespoke methodologies (Dunbar, 2014).

Firstly, there is a physiological component to breathing for the disciplines. Glasheen (2017) warns that acting mimics everyday voice use which would seem to require commonplace breathing, but that is misguided: the actor must eradicate habitual vocal and physical patterns which could impede breathing and affect the relationship with the text. Master et al. (2015) found that the most pronounced physiological difference between actors' and untrained voices were correlated to respiratory function based on a strict phonation protocol which highlighted a marked difference in sub-glottal pressure. Melton (2014) even categorises acting as a vocal genre alongside more conventional genres such as classical, pop, and jazz, highlighting the unique vocal demands of acting. Hence, it seems possible that acting requires its own set of breathing techniques which assists the actor's phonation, including volume, accents, and characterisation (Glasheen, 2017). Breathing for singing is a complex neurological and physiological system (Morton, 2014; Moss Erickson, 2022) which allows for the act of singing which includes vocal fold closure, tone quality and breath pressure (Kayes, 2004). There is a difference in the breathing needs and outcomes for

actors and singers which implies that the integration of singing and acting has a breath component which plays an essential and possibly elusive role in realising an authentic MT performance.

Next, there is a performance component to the breath and how it is used. The technical mastery of breathing is fundamental in MT because it allows the singer-actor to sustain the melody while telling the story through the lyrics (Dunbar, 2016). Stanislavski believed that breath connected the actor with emotions (Merlin, 2014; Dunbar, 2016), however, Merlin (2014) points out that breathing requirements for performance are different from those for conveying emotions. For example, when a character is meant to cry but the actor needs to vocally fill a large auditorium, the actor faces a conflict of how to breathe. Broadening this disparity to MT, as with words and music, there could be a disconnect between breathing for singing and for acting. Singers are specific about when they breathe so they can complete a musical phrase whereas actors attach breath to the thought (Harvard, 2013), potentially highlighting a discrepancy. Harvard (2013, p.108) recognises this conundrum and observes that the score does not always allow for “one breath per thought” as is common in acting. The singer-actor must discern appropriate places to breathe for which he offers a number of guidelines based on punctuation and rests in the libretto (Harvard, 2013). Deer and Dal Vera (2021) observe that vocal technique, which includes breathing, is so demanding that acting is easily neglected. They mitigate for this by suggesting that the performer connect breath to “ideas” and that “all ideas initiate a breath” (Deer and Dal Vera, 2021, p. 193) which can be applied to both sung and spoken text. The syntax is different, but both Deer and Dal Vera (2021) and Harvard (2013) seem to be advocating the same process for integration which fails to directly address the breathing dilemma. While acknowledging the difficulty of integration, these practitioners seem to offer ‘band-aids’ rather than concrete solutions. In contrast to the position that breathing for song is very demanding, Kayes (2004), a vocal technician, concludes her chapter on breathing with the instruction that if the singer-actor’s body and vocal mechanism are in alignment, the breath will fall into place. Based on experience, this seems like good advice but could be construed as reductive by not allowing for the performer’s experience and technique. The lack of primary research which compares and contrasts breathing for actors and singers seems to leave a gap in understanding how TTs could more effectively manage learning and performing the disciplines concurrently.

Finally, both practitioner and peer-reviewed literature provide the singer-actor with strategies for breathing integration. Monologuing the text, as delineated by Deer and Dal Vera (2021), is an exercise in which the music is removed and the lyrics are treated as a dramatic monologue. It asks the performer to insert phrasing (breaths) into the stand-alone lyrics

separate from the musical phrasing in order to reveal the character's dramatic intention. Conversely, Stinton (2019) offers a process for 'monologuing the music' where the musical elements of a song give the singer-actor clues to characterisation by singing the song without words on a syllable. While Stinton (2019) does not explicitly mention breathing as one of those clues, it implies a breathing component consistent with observations made in the voice studio. Taken in isolation, these two exercises may prompt confusion since they appear at odds; however analysed fully, the combination of the two methods could provide a framework for integration revealing emotional cues in both the lyric and the music. These exercises also suggest a connection between the breath and the integration of words and music as delineated in the previous section.

In addition, Glasheen's (2017) study on navigating the multi-disciplinary nature of TTs considers acting as one of the disciplines. It is the only study found which addresses the practical experience of singing and acting (and dancing) concurrently; consequently, the following is a description rather than a comparison. As a practitioner-researcher, Glasheen (2017) observed that her acting diminished when performing singing, acting, and dancing concurrently, but when her respiratory stamina increased, her acting motivations improved. For the study, participants used patterned breathing when performing a short sung and choreographed sequence with acting as a variable, first performed without acting and then with acting in front of a panel of observers (Glasheen, 2017). The results suggest that participants were able to engage with their acting objectives in a more concentrated and convincing way and the observers noticed an improvement in vocal technique and confirmed the actors' objectives (Glasheen, 2017). While these results provide a concrete demonstration of the integration of breathing while acting and singing with positive outcomes, a follow-up study is needed to examine correlation and causation and replicable results with a larger sample size. However, as this appears to be the only study of its kind, it may provide a useful examination of breathing for the MT disciplines of acting and singing with greater rigour than the practitioner literature. Additional research which measures the effectiveness of cross-disciplinary breathing techniques could be valuable to educate voice teachers, coaches, and music directors in order to potentially improve MT training and performance in practice.

Emotional Expression in ATS

Singer-actors must integrate words, music, and emotion to tell a story which connects them to the audience (Cuny, 2022). This section explores the relationship between emotion and ATS. A brief overview of the definition of emotion and emotion theory contextualises the

singer-actor's engagement with emotions. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines emotion as "a strong feeling deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationship with others" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 1436). Although a lexical definition lacks rigour since it does not account for scholarly debate (Scarantino and Griffiths, 2011), it could provide an orientation for the emotion theories to follow. Two of the main emotion theories are basic emotion theory, the view that emotions are inherently biological (Campeggiani, 2023) and psychological constructionism, the view that emotions are related to subjectivity and culture (Feldman Barrett, 2017). Morgan (2025) asserts that the constructionism theory is performative because emotions are learned, making it particularly suited to ATS. Nonetheless, performers rarely adopt emotion theories, instead drawing on practitioner-based approaches, aligning with Hetzler's (2007) conclusion that modern western actors do not feel emotions rather react to specific situations as a character. There is a large body of research which focuses on emotion as a component of vocal expression; however, research on emotional expression in singing is emergent and comparatively limited (Sundberg, Salomão and Scherer, 2021; Morgan, 2025). Another relevant component of emotional research specific to the voice is encoding, what the speaker conveys and decoding, what the listener hears (Scherer, 2003; Morgan, 2025). It is important that the encoder (the singer-actor) is emotionally specific so that the decoder (the audience) perceives the emotion as intended in the storytelling (Juslin and Laukka, 2003; Morgan, 2025). It could be argued that performers are required to employ vocal emotional expressivity in order to evoke an emotional response from the listener. Accordingly, emotion may be linked to how a voice professional teaches ATS in the studio because it is an essential component of ATS (Cuny, 2018).

Emotion is detected in the voice through pitch, tempo, volume, rhythm, articulation, breath, and voice quality (Streeton and Raymond, 2014; Hakanpää, Waaramaa and Laukkanen, 2019). These may represent some of the ways that the singer-actor can express vocal emotion with the aim of evoking an emotional response from the audience. Prochazkova and Kret (2017, p. 100, 101) identify two ways that listeners perceive emotion: "emotional contagion" and "brain to brain coupling." Emotional contagion is the tendency to mirror the emotional state of another and brain to brain coupling is when the observer's nervous system mimics another's emotional state involuntarily and physically (Prochazkova and Kret, 2017). The main weakness of this review, as recognised by Prochazkova and Kret (2017), is that all of the studies rely on manufactured rather than real interactions; therefore, the results could be skewed. However acting, by nature, is manufactured so the study could be useful for ATS. While the singer-actor can present an emotion without actually feeling it (Juslin, Laukka and Bänziger, 2018), the audience may feel what the performer is trying to

convey. This phenomenon aligns with the Alba Emoting method, an 'outside-in' psychophysiological based method which uses physical choices such as posture, gesture, and breath to evoke an emotional state on stage (Beck, 2010; Morgan, 2025). The technique may be particularly useful for ATS because it allows emotional expressivity without the internal feelings, thereby supporting performance quality and vocal health (Beck, 2010). As a performer, the 'outside-in' method has been useful in practice based on work with practitioner, Wesley Balk, who emphasised facial expression and gesture in order to evoke an emotional response (Balk, 1985). The neuroscientific component of emotions within ATS might be central to understanding the experiences of both performer and audience. Neuroscience is outside the scope of this review. Nonetheless, it may be important for voice professionals to recognise its influence on ATS and consider it in their teaching practice.

It appears that practitioners play a significant role in defining how emotional expression is understood in ATS, though there is a lack of consensus amongst them. When working with the Moscow Art Theatre and the Bolshoi Opera, Stanislavski believed that singing and acting were complementary and that each technique augmented the other (Autant-Mathieu, 2024). He regarded the actor's craft as dynamic and authentic, contending that technique must exist with emotional expressivity in order to realise the dramatic circumstances (Krasner, 2014; Dunbar, 2016). Deer and Dal Vera (2021) advance that the song is the crux of the difference between theatre and MT, where the audience experiences the emotional life of the character through ATS. Harvard (2013) offers that as a character's emotional state heightens, the performer moves from speech to song. In contrast, drawing on her experience as a practitioner, Gow (2016, p. 134) argues that equating the song with heightened emotional expression instigates an "undesirable emotional state." She goes on to describe that an emotional state is different from an emotion and can originate from the singer-actor's response to the music (Gow, 2016). Kayes (2004) suggest that emotional connection is achieved by balancing the lyric within the framework of the music using vocal conventions such as manipulating vowels, eliding words, and changing the accents in a phrase. These conventions indicate that the uniformity of the voice can be a secondary concern when the priority is emotional expression (Li, 2024). Deer and Dal Vera (2021) extend this idea and contend that in modern MT, singers often deviate from the written melody to convey the lyric's intention and emotion more authentically and that even composers are aware that musical notation cannot fully capture expressive phrasing. Singers with extensive acting experience tend to prioritise emotional expression over voice technique and the inverse is true for those with little to no acting training (Livingstone, Choi and Russo, 2014; Morgan, 2025). As a vocal coach, it has been observed that every student has a prioritised discipline: singing, acting, or dancing. Singers tend to focus on vocal

technique, actors can be intimidated by singing, and dancers are often the freest, most uninhibited singer-actors as they are the most connected to their bodies. A practice-informed exploration of these anecdotal observations should be the subject of future research.

In practice, voice professionals should be aware that there are potential physical risks to the vocal mechanism caused by overpowering emotions during performance (Coutinho, Scherrer and Dibben, 2014; Morgan, 2025). Intense emotions may increase laryngeal and pharyngeal tension and subglottal pressure stimulation (Laukka, Juslin and Bresin, 2005; Dietrich *et al.*, 2008; Morgan, 2022; Thomas and Alexander, 2025). In their study, Laukka, Juslin and Bresin (2005, p. 649) used “emotion portrayals rather than naturally occurring vocal expressions” which may affect results. Nevertheless, similar to Prochazkova and Kret (2017), while this is a limitation in the wider context of the study, it could be beneficial in the voice studio or rehearsal room because it has been suggested that emotional expression is at the root of ATS (Deer and Dal Vera, 2021). The risks to vocal health may present ethical challenges surrounding the synthesis of emotion, acting, and singing in the voice studio. Many singing teachers are required to teach MT but are not trained in the integration of disciplines (Cuny, 2022). Singing teachers do not have to be experts in acting, but they must be mindful of their students’ expectations regarding performance (Edwards and Hoch, 2018; Morgan, 2025). In order to teach ethically, avoiding physical harm, voice professionals should understand how emotion integrates with the voice in order to meet those expectations.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

The main limitation for this literature review was the lack of primary research into voice and acting integration. While the studies by Glasheen (2017) and Morgan (2025) were valuable resources, the scarcity of studies and other peer-reviewed literature required a reliance on practitioner literature. Quality and validity can be compromised in grey literature (Winter, 2023) and the analysis of practitioner texts indicated an absence of practitioner consensus. Although initial impressions suggested similarity among perspectives, further examination indicated that each practitioner approached ATS from a distinct point of view, possibly reflecting changing trends and personal preferences. While there is a paucity of peer-reviewed literature which researches the challenges TTs encounter in general (Curtis, 2019; Flynn, 2022a; Thomas and Alexander, 2025), further research on ATS could be beneficial to practitioners, specifically into the three topics explored: the relationship of words and music, breathing, and emotion.

It should be noted that neuroscience was minimally discussed in this review despite its significance to ATS because of the confines of the assignment. Further investigation into the “cognitive turn” in acting and neuroscience as it applies to breathing and emotion for singer-actors could enhance pedagogical approaches to ATS. Additionally, the outside-in approach to acting appears to have significant physical and performative implications for singer-actors, influencing emotional expression on stage (Beck, 2010; Morgan, 2025). This is of particular interest given its connection to Balkian methodology (Balk, 1985) and could be an area for personal research. Overall, ATS would benefit from more research (Morgan, 2025) in the Practice as Research paradigm (Oram, 2015) which may provide insights into applied teaching and performance experiences, potentially contributing to improvements in pedagogy and performance. Raised awareness and training for voice professionals in ATS could result in a more balanced and informed approach in the voice studio.

Conclusion

Singing, dancing, and acting concurrently form a foundational principle of MT (Sliiden, Beck and MacDonald, 2017). The TT performer demonstrates the ability to integrate the three disciplines with precision (Glasheen, 2017; Moore, 2024) in order to express emotion through characterisation (Cuny, 2022). Choosing two of the three disciplines for this review, singing and acting, the research question explores the complementary and contrary aspects of their techniques. Despite the industry’s expectation of integration (Cuny, 2022), both peer-reviewed and practitioner literature reveal a disjunct between singing and acting pedagogies. Stanislavski’s psychophysical provides a model for understanding integration (Dunbar, 2016); however, its application to ATS rests almost entirely with practitioners whose methodologies have different foci, possibly causing confusion. Breathing for singing and acting are in contrast, but emerging research provides strategies to bring them into alignment (Glasheen, 2017). Emotional expressivity in ATS is complex in that it relies heavily on cognitive neuroscience and is dependent upon current trends in MT (Deer and Dal Vera, 2021; Li, 2024). In addition, it may generate physical risks which pose an ethical concern for singing teachers (Coutinho, Scherrer and Dibben, 2014; Morgan, 2025). ATS emphasises how the disciplines complement and contradict one another and further research might unite theory and practice (Dunbar, 2014). A thorough exploration of the topics covered in this review helped to meet the aims and objective set out in the Planned Programme of study and will inform the next two modules of this MA programme. In my practice, I work exclusively with MT singers where I use a combination of practitioner methodologies to train students in ATS, often with demonstrable effectiveness. I can

implement strategies I learned from this review to augment current approaches into my teaching. TTs routinely take to the stage to sing and act (and dance), captivating audiences world-wide, though there is no consensus on how they achieve this. This raises important questions for practitioner-researchers about how TTs experience ATS, offering insights which could inform the voice professional's practice.

Critical Reflection

Throughout this MA in vocal pedagogy, I have been required to write a critical reflection for most assignments. During Module 3, a primary research project, I discovered my research values aligned with a fully qualitative methodology. An important tenet of qualitative research is reflexivity which “is the practice of critical reflection on your role as researcher and your research practice and process” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 5). A useful tool to embed reflexivity is to write a reflexive journal which is a place the researcher can record thoughts and discoveries and make meaning of them (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Pieper *et al.*, 2021). However, a reflexive journal also needs an analytical component to assist with feedback on what is written in it (Wisniewski, Zierer and Hattie, 2020; Pieper *et al.*, 2021). A number of reflective models facilitate a deeper analysis of reflexive journal entries. The Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle (Figure 4) is iterative, has a ‘feelings’ component, and encourages an ‘action plan’ which helps to bridge current research with future research (Ezezika and Johnston, 2023). Here, I critically analyse three observations which I made in my reflexive journal during the life cycle of this assignment.

Figure 4



Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (The Reach Approach, 2024)

Reflection 1: Bias

Description: As an insider-researcher, I accept that biases are part of my process because of my practice and expertise (Scott, 2024) and that subjectivity can be used positively (Braun and Clarke, 2021). However, when attempting to discern a research question (RQ), my biases delayed that process.

Feelings: The overall feeling was frustration. Previously, I was able to determine an RQ easily and early in the research. For this assignment, it was a long and iterative process which seemed to produce nothing useable, until it did.

Evaluation: A negative was that research, determining a pearl, chaining (Schlosser *et al.*, 2006), and writing were delayed. A positive was that I learned what I did not want to write about, for example vocal health, and that research is the path toward the RQ. **Analysis:** In Module 3, a theme that emerged from thematic analysis of interviews was that ATS is often an afterthought for performers (Descher, 2025). I was insistent about exploring that theme in the current assignment, however, there is no research in that area. The RQ I wanted was for a primary research project rather than for a literature review; therefore, I had to be flexible about what I had envisioned and adapt to the requirements of the assignment. **Conclusion:** I should have realised that my bias was affecting the research much earlier in the process and what works for one assignment is not always replicable for the next. Qualitative research is “dynamic and interactive” (Lim, 2023) so it will change with each project.

Action Plan: For future assignments, I will research and read literature at the beginning of the process after which I will begin to determine the RQ. The initial idea may develop or change as a part of my research methodology. FINER criteria (feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant) and the PICOT framework (problem, intervention, comparison, outcome, and timeframe) are necessary tools for determining the RQ and will be employed at the beginning of the process (Richardson *et al.*, 1995; Hulley, Newman and Cummings, 2013) for future literature reviews.

Reflection 2: Topic Change

Description: The design of my literature review centred on three topics related to ATS. While writing the assignment and discovering more peer-reviewed literature, I decided to change one of those topics.

Feelings: I thrive in a structured and ordered environment so flexibility does not come naturally to me (reference Reflection 1). Nonetheless, I was able to make the decision swiftly and decisively because I felt change was the only option.

Evaluation: At first, I experienced resistance to change but change incites creativity (Hon, Bloom and Crant, 2014) which I accepted at the decision point to change.

Analysis: One of my initial topics was neuroscience. As I researched the intersection of neuroscience with acting and singing, it became clear that one topic would be insufficient to cover the vast amount of literature which exists. My literature pearl gave me an alternative. As a result, I shifted to the new topic on the relationship of words and music (Dunbar, 2016). I was still able to include neuroscience in the section on emotion but it was more manageable.

Conclusion: The inclusion of neuroscience as a topic would have been untenable for this review. I could have realised that earlier in the process, but the shift was a key takeaway for how I view my research.

Action Plan: In my reflexive journal, I wrote, “trust your gut” about this change. I understand that both Reflections 1 and 2 are recurring patterns of conceptual development which require agility and adaptability. I can trust my instincts and intellect to lead me to the right solutions.

Reflection 3: Acting and ATS Methodologies

Description: During the research for this review, I recognised that, although I teach ATS every day as a part of my practice, my knowledge of acting theory and technique is lacking.

Feelings: This realisation elicited a profound feeling of ‘imposter syndrome’ which is when success is credited to luck rather than one’s ability (Gottlieb, 2023).

Evaluation: Throughout the research process, I gained knowledge about acting and ATS. That reinforced the idea that while I have a foundational understanding of acting, there is a gap which I will need to close.

Analysis: As part of my course at university, I took one acting class and a comparative arts class which included acting theory. I studied with Wesley Balk at a workshop and my master’s degree in vocal performance required acting skills. However, this was over 30 years ago. Acting theory and technique, particularly with regards to ATS, have evolved during this time (Flynn, 2022b; Merlin, 2024) and it is pertinent for me to update my proficiency in these subjects.

Conclusion: When my practice as a singer and singing teacher pivoted from western classical to MT, I should have paid attention to the acting component. Anecdotal and outdated technique is not acceptable to me regarding the voice and the same should apply to acting and ATS.

Action Plan: ATS is important to me both as a researcher and as a practitioner; therefore, both textual and practical learning are necessary to update my understanding and application of ATS techniques. Further reading, classes, and private coaching are ways I can achieve this goal.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Research Question Process

18/08/2025

Theme from Module 3

Acting through song enhanced performance but is often an afterthought.

How does acting through song enhance singing?

Why does acting improve singing?

Character

How can voice teachers integrate acting through song into singing lessons?

Why do triple threat performers omit acting until the end of the learning process?

How does acting improve singing?

20/08/2025

Tutorial w/Louisa Morgan

Element or method?

Approach

Strict inclusion criteria – how to integrate peer reviewed

Bring in singing pedagogy

Tonal expressivity

Choose one element of Stanislavski

Circles external focus of attention

Kitty Verdolini – motor learning

Katherine

Heidi Moss Erickson

Lynn Holding

Jennie Morton

01/09/2025

Tutorial with Sophie Yaeger

How does 'acting through song' impact singing and can the Stanislavski circles be integrated?

- Make a case for why people shouldn't 'sprinkle acting on at the end.'
- Can I reference my last paper?

Working Question:

How does acting influence the performance and technical elements of singing in musical theatre?

Working Title:

The influence of acting on singing in musical theatre: a review of performance and technical elements of the singing voice.

Working Title:

Exploring acting techniques for the singing MT performer.

02/09/2025

How can acting techniques can support the MT singer?

Interim

Research and reading

02/11/2025

How can acting techniques complement singing technique for the MT performer?

Acting through song: are acting techniques complementary or anomalous (divergent, antithetic) to singing techniques for the MT performer?

Breathing

Neurology

Emotion

Silo

05/11/2025

Are acting techniques complementary or contrary (antithetical) to singing techniques for the MT performer?

Appendix 2

Search Term Worksheet

Search Terms In Order	Database	Filters	Results	Notes
the singing actor	UWTSD Library	None	1885	
the singing actor	UWTSD Library	Peer-reviewed, articles, English	382	
singing actor	UWTSD Library	Peer-reviewed, articles, English, exact phrase	14	Note: All but one was an actual journal article. The rest were reviews and interviews.
the singing actor	Google Scholar	None	13,600	
the singing actor	Google Scholar	exact phrase	1	Google scholar filters are not granular. Not useful
singing actor	Google Scholar	exact phrase	9	none were useful
acting through song	UWTSD Library	None	4736	without the exact phrase, there were a lot of medical articles
acting through song	UWTSD Library	Peer-reviewed, articles, English, exact phrase	2	1 book, 1 theses - saved dissertation for references.
triple threat singing	UWTSD Library	none	6	Either not useful or already had from last paper
triple threat acting	UWTSD Library	Peer-reviewed, articles, English	11	Mostly medical articles, either not useful or had from the last paper
acting through song	Studies in Theatre and Performance (Taylor & Francis)	None	385	
acting through song	Taylor and Francis database	exact match		One review (possible grey lit source), one not editorial.
singing actor	Studies in Theatre and Performance (Taylor & Francis)	none	364	
singing actor	Taylor and Francis database	exact match	36	Bennett, Dunbar, grey lit
acting through song	Theatre, Dance, and Performance Training (Journal)	none	2	not useful
singing actor	Theatre, Dance, and Performance Training (Journal)	none	4	Bennett
acting through song	Studies in Musical Theatre	none	0	
singing actor	Studies in Musical Theatre	none	0	
	Studies in Musical Theatre	manual review of issues	1	This was about practice as research.
Resources from Acting Approaches for Singing Teachers course				Dunbar
musical theatre singing	UWTSD Library	none	3808	Mostly technique and science of singing (interesting!)
musical theatre singing	UWTSD Library	Peer-reviewed, articles, English, exact phrase	848	Led to grey literature
musical theatre acting	UWTSD Library	none	1333	
musical theatre acting	UWTSD Library	Peer-reviewed, articles, English,	361	A few interesting items
Pearl	Database	Method		
Stanislavski's system in musical theatre actor training: anomalies of acting song (Dunbar, 2016).	UWTSD Library	Forward Chaining	1	Kafoa, 2025
	Google Scholar	Forward Chaining	20	Kafoa, 2025; Cuny, 2022; Stinton, 2023
	Taylor & Francis	Forward Chaining		Kafoa, 2025; Morgan, 2025; Cuny 2022
	UWTSD Library	Backward Chaining	0	
	Google Scholar	Backward Chaining	Does not exist	
	Taylor & Francis	Backward Chaining	26	100% Grey literature
	References	Backward Chaining	26	100% Grey literature
	Footnotes			Gow, 2016; grey literature
How do listeners perceive emotional genuineness in musical theatre performers, and how might this help to inform the pedagogy of acting through song? (Morgan, 2025)	References	Backward Chaining		Brand new 30/10/2025 so no forward chaining. Livingstone, Steven R., Deanna H. Choi, and Frank A. Russo, 2014; Edwards, Matthew, and Matthew Hoch, 2018; Cuny, 2018; Edgar, 2022; Scherer, et al., 2017; Becker and Watson, 2025