



BOOK REVIEW: *The Evolving Singing Voice: Changes Across the Lifespan*

by Karen Brunssen

Review by Brian Manternach

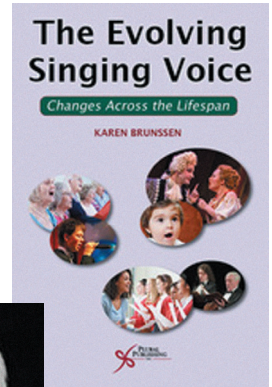
In the introduction of her recent book, Karen Brunssen reveals how her curiosity about the lifespan of the voice started many years ago—with a decidedly less “academic” tone than her contributions on the subject in recent years. On a college choir tour, she performed an autobiographical, comedic skit that reenacted her own vocal journey from a thumb-sucking three-year-old to a self-conscious breathy-voiced junior high student to an overenthusiastic, chest-voice-dominant teenager to a college student first discovering her vibrato.

Now a recognized leader with a remarkable record of publications and presentations on the topic, Brunssen has written a comprehensive book titled *The Evolving Singing Voice: Changes Across the Lifespan*. Tracking the natural, chronological order of human voice development, the book includes sections devoted to newborns, infants, children, adolescents, young adults, adults, and the “senescent” (or aging) singer. Chapters highlight the structural changes that occur within the body and larynx at each stage. The book also offers training guidelines as well as reasonable expectations for appropriate vocal sound based on the specific needs, capabilities, and limitations determined by each stage of development.

The Evolving Singing Voice is well-referenced and up-to-date, as we have come to expect from the resources put out by Plural Publishing. Indeed, though the book was released in June 2018, many citations come from sources published as recently as 2017.

The book is steeped in reliable voice science, but Brunssen makes no assumptions about each reader’s background. By defining pertinent terms and concepts along the way, she ensures that a wide audience can access and understand the information presented.

As author, Brunssen brings an extensive background to the book. A professional singer for more than thirty years, she has successfully managed her own voice through many of the stages of evolution identified in the book. She has additional experience as a teacher, clinician, and adjudicator for major organizations across multiple continents. She teaches on the faculty of the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, where she is co-chair of music performance, is a member of the American Academy of



Karen
Brunssen

Teachers of Singing, and serves as the current president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS).

Despite her considerable accomplishments and qualifications, Brunssen invites multiple voice professionals to lend their own experiences to the book as guest contributors. These outside perspectives establish a spirit of collaboration, which is one of the greatest features of the book. For instance, the chapter “Medical Assessment Across the Lifespan” is written by three guest authors: Michiel Bove (a medical doctor and assistant professor of otolaryngology and head and neck surgery), Nathan Waller (a speech-language pathologist with MM and MA degrees), and Peter Wagreich (a speech-language pathologist at a children’s hospital in Chicago). Brunssen co-authored the chapter “The Senescent Singer” with singing voice specialist and speech-language pathologist Aaron M. Johnson, and many chapters include sections in which teachers and singers share in-studio experiences.

The most substantial guest contributions come from Chadley Ballantyne, who co-wrote the chapter “The Adolescent Years,” which includes an in-depth discussion of resonance and voice acoustics as well as teaching examples borne out of his experience working with four teenage singers. He wrote a section of the “Young Adult” chapter, he co-wrote a section about semi-occluded vocal tract exercises, and he provides a walk-through of the “weird” vocal exercise he created, which he has presented at conferences for the Pan American Vocology Association and NATS.

By soliciting the input of so many guest authors, Brunssen models the expectation for modern voice instruction, which is based on the voice care team approach of the medical profession. Eschewing the single-authority, master/apprentice course of action, Brunssen incorporates information from various pertinent parties, who all bring their own level of relevant expertise. This collaborative, interdisciplinary path ensures that the book will be useful to voice professionals in a variety of areas and supports voice training that is multifaceted and cooperative.

To this end, readers will benefit from each chapter. Brunssen states in the introduction that readers may skip directly to the sections that apply to the specific age groups with which they work most often. However, since the book addresses the entire lifespan of the human voice (from *in-utero* to advanced age), those who read the book cover-to-cover stand to gain a more thorough understanding of how voices evolve, and will be better equipped to help facilitate their students’ and clients’ safe passage through the various stages of vocal development.

A simple fact of life is that our bodies—and therefore, our voices—are constantly changing. Janne Teller acknowledges this reality somewhat ominously in her famous quote: “From



Brian Manternach, tenor, is on the voice faculty of the University of Utah’s Department of Theatre, maintains a private studio, and serves as Utah District Governor for the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) and Western Governor for the Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA). His students have been cast in professional productions in the US and abroad and have earned top honors in vocal competitions from the local to international levels. A recipient of the NATS Voice Pedagogy Award, he has given national/international presentations for the Voice Foundation, the Voice and Speech Trainers Association, PAVA, the National Center for Voice and Speech, the University of Utah Voice Disorders Center, TEDxSaltLakeCity, and NATS at chapter, regional, and national conferences.

An associate editor of the *Journal of Singing*, he also authors “The Singer’s Library” book review column for *Classical Singer* magazine.

Manternach has made solo appearances with the Milwaukee Symphony, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and Sinfonia Salt Lake, among others, and his stage credits range from Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* to Miles Gloriosus

the moment we are born we begin to die.” George Bernard Shaw offers a decidedly more positive outlook: “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

Although change of any kind can be both terrifying and exhilarating, especially when it is related to something as personal as the human voice, Brunssen’s writing may change the mind of anyone who feels that high quality, sustainable, enjoyable singing can only occur during the limited years of peak performance capabilities. By outlining the most common and predictable vocal changes that occur over a lifetime and offering reliable training regimens for each stage, *The Evolving Singing Voice* is a dependable resource for singers and those entrusted with guiding their vocal development.

in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum to Belmonte in Die Entführung aus dem Serail. For two seasons, he served as apprentice-artist at the Skylight Opera Theatre in Milwaukee.

Originally from Iowa, his degrees in voice performance include a BA from St. John’s University/College of St. Benedict of Minnesota, an MM from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and a DM from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. He has completed additional training at the CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute at Shenandoah Conservatory and the Summer Vocology Institute.

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.