



# The Singer's Library

## So You **STILL** Want to Sing?

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH

The newest books in the *So You Want to Sing* series take on country, gospel, and sacred music.

**T**he year 2014 marked the beginning of a new series of books addressing the styles and vocal techniques necessary for singing in genres outside the classical realm. Credible resources regarding the efficient execution of these vocal styles had been somewhat scarce up to that point, which meant the books could fill a necessary gap in the literature.

What made this series even more significant, however, was the backing it received from the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). As an organization, NATS had a reputation for many years (deserved or not) for being unwelcoming toward those desiring to sing in “non-classical” genres. Singing Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) was believed by many NATS members to be harmful to the voice. Instead, these teachers perceived traditional, classical technique as the only way of singing that would not lead to a dismal vocal future.

Of course, the tide has been changing for some time. CCM techniques are regularly covered at NATS conferences and in the association’s *Journal of Singing*—so much so that it seems ridiculous to believe it ever resisted the subject.

In supporting the *So You Want to Sing* series, NATS took another step forward, sending a clear message that it is not only open to exploring the style, pedagogy, and repertoire of non-classical singing, but that the organization intends to be a leader in sharing the fact-based techniques that will promote efficient, sustainable, and informed performances.

The first three books in the series featured the popular styles of music theatre, rock ‘n’ roll, and jazz, respectively, and all three books were featured in this column. The series continues with three more volumes focusing on country, gospel, and sacred music.

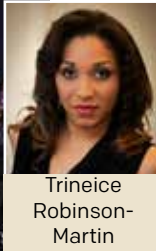
Those who follow the series will see in the new releases the same familiar format alongside several new changes. The most obvious change is in the title. While the first three books were subtitled “A Guide for Professionals,” the most recent volumes have adopted the subtitle “A Guide for Performers.” Regardless of the change, the books still serve a diverse audience of performers, teachers, and



Brian Manternach



aficionados—beginners through professional.



Trineice Robinson-Martin

The series also falls under new leadership. The original series editor, Karen Hall, provided oversight for the publication of the first three books and was the author of the inaugural book

in the series covering musical theatre. Now, Matthew Hoch takes over the reins as series

editor. An accomplished performer and scholar, Hoch is also an author in his own right with several books to his credit.

Besides the genre-specific information each book includes, the series continues to print the two common chapters that have appeared in each of the six volumes. Scott McCoy's chapter on voice science appears in its original format without alteration, while Wendy D. LeBorgne's chapter on vocal health adds new sections for each book with specific information

addressing the issues singers in each genre may face.

A new, third common chapter, "Using Audio Enhancement Technology," has been added to the series as well. Written by Matthew Edwards, the chapter first appeared in *So You Want to Sing Rock 'n' Roll*, which he authored. The chapter has since been expanded and will appear in all succeeding books of the series for which microphone use is pertinent.

Each book continues to have a companion website through [nats.org](http://nats.org) where additional information is shared, including musical examples, videos, vocal exercises, related website links, and other resources. The common chapters by McCoy, LeBorgne, and Edwards also include additional resources on the companion websites, which were not included for the first three books.

The fourth book of the series, *So You Want to Sing Country*, was written by Kelly K. Garner, who has extensive experience in the industry as a session singer, producer, and songwriter in Nashville and across the country. As an assistant professor of commercial voice at Belmont University, she teaches country vocal styles, studio singers, vocal ensemble,



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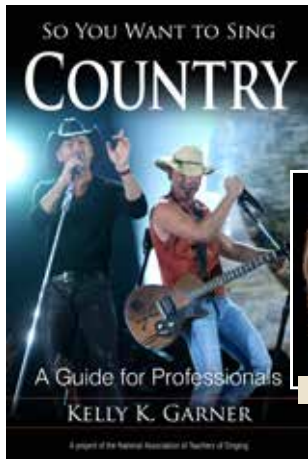
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Kelly K. Garner

and performance seminars. In keeping with the aim of the series, Garner provides context by outlining the history of country music and includes short profiles of many of the most significant artists in the genre.

The chapter called "Country Voice Pedagogy and Style" gets to the heart of her technical approach by addressing breath, resonance, belting, and the ever elusive "mix." She provides vocal exercises and identifies style techniques specific to singing country like the vocal flip, the country "hitch," and the "fall off."

Though Garner dedicates a chapter to "Performing Country Music," it seems equal or greater emphasis is given to the chapter called "The Country Song." Garner lists the ability to recognize a quality song as an important skill since, as she writes, "if the song

is not a quality song, no amount of good singing will make the artist successful."

Additional chapters—such as those titled "Career Options in Country Music" and "Business Considerations"—turn to practical concerns, including working as a recording artist, working as a backup vocalist, and knowing when to hire a manager.

This is more than just an introductory guide; in fact, one would be hard pressed to find another resource on country singing that is as thorough, all encompassing, and grounded in solid pedagogical understanding.

Trineice Robinson-Martin was an obvious choice to author the fifth book in the series, *So You Want to Sing Gospel*. With a doctoral degree from Columbia University in music education with an emphasis in contemporary commercial music vocal pedagogy, she holds additional certification in Somatic Voicework The LoVetri Method and is on the national faculty of the Gospel Music Workshop of America, Inc.

Robinson-Martin (or Dr. Trineice, as she is often called) discusses her personal journey and the disconnect between the sound elicited in her formal, collegiate voice lessons and the sound she was expected to make when singing in church. As she



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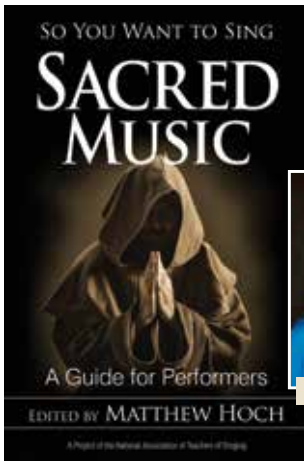


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continued to branch out as a performer, singing pop, rock, and R&B, she writes that her "limitations as a trained



Matthew Hoch

vocalist were finally exposed." After being diagnosed with muscle tension dysphonia and having surgery to remove an

acute polyp, Robinson-Martin made it her mission

to read, research, and study everything that would reveal the strategies that would allow her to safely sing in multiple genres. In the book, she shares the discoveries that were borne out of her research and experience as a performer and teacher.

Like the other books of the series, *So You Want to Sing Gospel* devotes significant space to overviewing the history of the genre and explaining the style and performance practices that are particular to it. There are also frequent references to recordings (accessible

on the companion website) that demonstrate the stylistic characteristics described in the book. All of these pages guide readers on *what* to do while the specifics of *how* to sing gospel are covered in the chapter called "Gospel Music Voice Pedagogy." Here, Robinson-Martin outlines the first three of what she calls the four major components for musical development: anatomical awareness, vocal fitness training, and style conditioning.

In describing technique, Robinson-Martin states that many of the exercises and pedagogic concepts in the book are not specific only to gospel. Many of the techniques she promotes are applicable to voice training for other styles of music as well. Some concepts, however, are more limited to gospel and other related CCM genres, including flipping registration, extending the vocal range while maintaining a chest-dominant vocal quality, and creating a variety of "gravel" sounds, including squall, whoop, growls, and midvoice.

The fourth component for musical development—style coaching or style interpretation—is discussed at length in the chapter titled "Gospel Styles, Performance Practices, and Improvisational Tools."

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Here Robinson-Martin defines common melodic interpolations like slides, leans, bends, falls, scoops, turns, tails, and runs. But she emphasizes that experienced gospel singers need not use an overabundance of these "vocal acrobatics" in order to be effective. In fact, she believes amateur singers often get caught up in the "wow factor" of these stylistic additions and, as a result, end up detracting from the emotional context of the song.

With her book, Robinson-Martin hopes to provide insights and "bring nomenclature to concepts in gospel music voice pedagogy." Indeed, the great challenge for CCM singers and teachers is to identify successful practices, give those practices a name, and begin to develop reliable procedures to create stylistically authentic sounds in healthy and sustainable ways. In this regard, *So You Want to Sing Gospel* is a tremendous contribution to furthering our understanding of how to sing in CCM styles.

The sixth book in the series, *So You Want to Sing Sacred Music*, is the first book that does not have a central author. Besides including the common chapters from the other books, guest authors contribute chapters specific to the music of their own religious backgrounds, including "Jewish Traditions," "Gregorian Chant and Polyphony," "Contemporary Catholic Directions," "Sacred Choral Traditions," and "Contemporary Christian Music."

In this book, Hoch takes on three roles: series editor, volume editor, and author of the "Sacred Choral Traditions" chapter. He draws on his experience as a professional chorister and as a choirmaster for an Episcopal church to provide an

overview of the numerous types of church choir experiences available, from all-volunteer groups to professional ensembles in both small and large parishes. He also describes the technical and stylistic differences between choral and solo singing (including the hot topic of vibrato) and outlines a process for securing work in professional church choirs.

Evan Kent, author of the "Jewish Traditions" chapter, served for 25 years as the cantor at Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles and is now on the faculty of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem. His chapter describes the liturgical origins and musical characteristics of Jewish music. It then describes the process of becoming a cantor, highlighting the handful of institutions that offer cantorial education.

The chapters on music from the Catholic traditions were written by Anthony Ruff, a priest and Benedictine monk of Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota. A scholar, musician, and author of the liturgy blog *Pray Tell*, Ruff also serves as associate professor of theology at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota. Fr. Ruff's chapters provide extensive historical background and context for music in Catholic liturgy and explore the training requirements and performance skills necessary for singing in the liturgical setting.

Lastly, Sharon L. Radionoff's chapter on Contemporary Christian Music begins by explaining the misnomer of the word "contemporary," considering the genre has its origins in gospel traditions that reach back to the 1940s. From



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those early roots—and extending all the way to the megachurches of today—Radionoff describes the diverse musical characteristics of CCM (which ranges from rock to R&B to hip-hop, among other styles), the training requirements for the field, and the vocal techniques necessary for the style. A singing voice specialist and voice technologist at the Texas Voice Center in Houston, Radionoff is also director of the Sound Singing Institute and an active clinician, lecturer, researcher, and author.

Although *So You Want to Sing Sacred Music* is not the biggest volume of the series, it arguably covers the most ground. Each individual topic could certainly be expanded to fill an entire book (if not an entire bookshelf) on its own. As part of a shared volume, however, the authors masterfully pare down their writing to include only the most essential and most pertinent information so as to provide sufficient introduction to their area of expertise. They also include lists of additional resources from which curious readers can seek more in-depth information.

The first publication of the *So You Want to Sing* series in 2014 laid out the decidedly ambitious

goals for the books that would follow. Now, after the publication of the sixth book, the authors and editors have remained remarkably consistent in both format and the high quality of content within the books. True to the initial mission of the series, each volume is appropriate for students, teachers, and professionals as they provide sufficient background and introduction to each genre alongside endless resources—sound and print—for further exploration.

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