THE VAULT: Vol 4

The official newsletter of CSU Middle School Outreach Ensembles (MSOE) 2025

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The Voice: Understanding the Instrument

Aundrea Dugas, Teaching Artist

This is a landmark year for MSOE with the introduction of its very first choir! Middle school is a time of picking the ensemble track that feels like the right fit. For those who fall in love with choir, it marks the beginning of a journey of relating to a very personal instrument, the voice. While all musicians can struggle with comparing themselves to others, singers often struggle more significantly with this because of the close relationship with our voice and how we conceptualize our identity, capabilities and self-worth. It may appear that one student is naturally able to sing with advanced techniques, while another student is unsure if that skill is something they can learn or if that goal is innately out of reach. (It is definitely within reach! You just need access to the necessary knowledge and an intentional approach.) In order to provide as much access for students to develop their musicianship, the choral classroom should provide a yellow brick road of foundational knowledge about the voice.

While many choirs provide a basic foundation of vocal knowledge, the context of the performance ensemble classroom can leave this type of instruction at a generalized level rather than an in-depth understanding level. Generalized descriptions during ensemble rehearsals are effective, but only to a certain extent. More specific knowledge can be gained during private voice lessons, but not every student has access to this resource. It is often the case that students entering collegiate study of the voice have to unlearn unhealthy vocal production habits. These habits create tension in the anatomy of the voice, leading to vocal fatigue and potential dysfunction. This reality presents a great opportunity to expose

students at an earlier age to a deeper understanding of how their voice works and how to operate their instrument in the healthiest way.

The key to improving this type of instruction in the ensemble setting is differentiation. Providing multiple entry points to the content allows students to engage with the content at the level that most closely meets their individual goals and needs. Musicians become experts at their instrument through this type of personal ownership of their craft. As educators, it is our job to introduce our students to different rabbit holes they can travel down at their own volition. Before they can decide which direction to travel, we must provide them with the roadmap of the voice.

To begin laying this foundation, all students should know the following components of vocal anatomy: the four stages of sound production (respiration, phonation, resonation and articulation), the seven resonators of the body (chest, tracheal tree, larynx, pharynx, oral cavity, nasal cavity, and sinuses), the registers of the voice and different types of breathing to name a few. With this understanding, students will be at an ideal place to begin individualized roads of exploration (Alexander Technique, Fach system of vocal classification, resonance techniques, genre-specific vocal styles, diction and IPA, singing in foreign languages, designing a personalized warmup and practice routine,...).

For those who want to do a deep dive on vocal anatomy should watch “Voice Production: The Vibrating Larynx,” a documentary from the 1960s of an excised larynx. They will be able to see what vocal folds look like while they are making sounds. The sound is quite surprising. Without the pharynx and oral cavity, the sound the vocal folds produce is similar to that of a buzzing bee. Some may prefer to study the anatomy through still pictures or drawings, but the black and white videography of this video provides adequate dissociation for most squeamish viewers.

Understanding vocal anatomy is helpful for transforming students’ beliefs about their voices. For example, if students knew that their vocal folds are not what makes a sound loud or soft, they would avoid straining and tensing muscles in their larynx and elsewhere to produce their desired effect. Additionally, knowing that their unique timbre is not predominantly a function of their anatomy or effort, but a function of the brain controlling muscle contractions in ways completely unique to them can create a sense of appreciation for discovering what their unique sound is like, rather than trying to sound exactly like a specific singer. Reframing their understanding of the function of each part of the vocal instrument helps singers adjust and improve their sound in the same way that a clarinetist needs to understand how each part of their instrument functions to produce a desired sound.

Within the MSOE ensemble setting, we see students and families who have gone out of their way to participate in making music and growing as musicians. During the lifetime of a musician, they spend countless hours practicing, performing in formal and impromptu concerts, performing their favorite songs and less than favorite songs, studying the theory and practice of music, improvising and composing, and spending time being silly and just having fun making music. However far our MSOE student-musicians desire to travel on their musicianship journey, we hope to send them off feeling capable and inspired to keep honing their craft and keep sharing their joy of music with others.

Building Your Students' Mosaics

Cameron Becker, Teaching Artist

Hannah Hassler wrote: "I am a mosaic of everyone I have ever loved." Imagine a mosaic for a brief moment- vibrant and uniquely arranged! Little inputs of relationships, experiences, and distinctive choices that build your character. Consider this within the context of music education. Pieces of teachers, friends, music, instruments, experiences, and stories all create our mosaics within music. Self-discovery and forming one's identity is a tricky yet critical subject to navigate, and it takes an entire lifetime to develop and evolve. Adolescence is a crucial period of self-discovery and identity formation. As our students enter an era of self-discovery, they create their mosaics piece by piece. We must provide them with a safe and resourceful space to attempt this task enthusiastically.

So, why is this critical? We don't just teach music within our classrooms: we teach how to be good people. We teach critical thinking and consideration for other perspectives. Diversity through engagement to new experiences and backgrounds develops empathy and understanding for others. A society that values diversity and understands the perspective of others is better equipped to address whatever modern challenges will arise and create a more equitable world.

How can we apply this concept to better help our students in MSOE? Now at week 4, our building has become more than just a space to find music in. Students have now created relationships with other students and with us as teaching artists. That itself is another stone added to the musical mosaic! Within our pillars of band, orchestra, and choir, we are offering a wide variety of pieces from various cultures and composers of different personal histories. Our teaching artists all derive from different backgrounds, stories, and values to provide unique insight to the students. We offer personal connections for students to find safety in and feel comforted when they attend rehearsals.
There is now a window of opportunity to push this envelope further! If students can meet you for who you really are, they can feel safe within your space. No learning will ever occur if students feel endangered. Create an open dialogue for creative expression over identity within your space. Opening the door with what interests you/what has impacted your development with students will enable them to search in the same manner. This allows them to breathe, learn, and grow in this new environment. Push the envelope this week with your students; put forward your mosaic!

The Colors of Music

Elise Renner, Teaching Artist

Music is more than just sounds. Music is something that shapes and connects us all through emotion, identity, and cultures. Being musicians, we are able to bring expressiveness and color into the musical world, that being with what instrument you play or how you utilize your voice as a way to convey feeling. However, how do we recognize these aspects of music when you are first beginning on your musical journey? As a beginning student I found it hard to connect with the music that I was performing and I was struggling to understand why pieces that we played were important. I would feel lost with how to truly connect with the work that I was putting in for music. Eventually, I was advised to bring my personality into my music, more specifically, bringing color into my music. The only thing that I have ever experienced with color in music was alluding to tone but this exercise was completely different. Pick a section within your music. What is it about to you? Is there a story that you have for this piece? These are all things that I would ask myself when practicing music. Focusing on a specific section within a piece and seeing a story with what I was playing made it easier to connect with the music and in the end made it more fluid and expressive with my interpretation. When talking about color, this means literally. The section of the piece has a dark and rich sound to it. Underline it with a color that you see fit. This is an amazing technique to utilize as a student because it makes connections easier to create with the music that you are working on in ensembles along with solo work. This will not only create a thing that the students can relate to and understand more clearly, this will also teach students about tone and shaping of their phrases and achieving true resonance in their instruments. Understanding why a specific section within your music has a certain “tone color” to it will then relate to the students playing and how they are able to effectively produce the sounds needed on their main instrument. In ensembles we are told as instrumentalists to play with a true tone. This could be confusing to students and understanding the piece that they are playing. What is a true tone and how does one achieve it? This can all be solved within the student mind for a clarity of understanding. Students grow and benefit from using their own creativity in music and that is what makes music special.

In MSOE, my goal is to strive for students to unlock their creative ability when they are playing their instrument. I hope that with being in MSOE I will be able to foster creativity within the students and to allow the space to be more open. I hope that through my lessons, the students learn more about performance and what it feels like to play confidently in front of people. I want the students to learn how to bring this confidence

back into their schools and to take on leadership opportunities in their ensembles. Being able to be authentic to yourself within the music classroom will not only benefit the students, but the educator as well. Confidence within identity in the music classroom can bring a musician a long way for their development as a performer and this is something that I want the students to come into every rehearsal feeling. Teaching students to bring out their personalities when playing their instrument is what truly makes music all of the things that we would describe it as. Being yourself is what creates fluidity in music and will bring out the true colors of the concept being conveyed.

The Peak Musical Experience: Joining the Continuous Conversation Through Music

Freya Underwood, Teaching Artist

As we all know, music is a language, a living conversation that stretches across time and space, and it's something that happens within us, through us, and around us. The peak musical experience occurs when we can tap into this eternal dialogue, an ongoing exchange that connects not just the living but also those who have passed before us and those who will come after. It is in these moments that we transcend the physical world and enter into a deeper realm, where music becomes not just a performance but a way of speaking with our hearts and souls.

At the core of this musical conversation is the understanding that our musical abilities are not just skills; they are ways in which we communicate deeply with others, both seen and unseen. When we play or sing, music resonates not just in our instruments or voices but in our bodies, in a place where passion and purpose converge. We feel it in our chest, our spine, and even our feet; the physical sensation of music is an embodiment of the emotions, thoughts, and intentions that flow

through us. It's this intimate connection between body and soul that creates the space for passion to ignite and for musical expression to transform into something transcendent.

One of the most profound connections we can make through music is the awareness of the Earth itself as a source of musical harmony. The Earth hums a natural tone, a constant B flat, which pulses beneath the surface of all existence. This subtle hum is always present, a reminder that the Earth itself is vibrating in a key that aligns with our own internal rhythms. When we tap into this natural frequency, we feel as though we are part of something much larger than ourselves.

I had a deeply moving experience with this connection at my Nana's funeral. During the ceremony, we sang a hymn in the key of B flat, intended to reach beyond the earthly plane and speak to the heavens. The pastor, seemingly randomly ringing bells throughout the service, did so on every B flat we sang. It was as if the bells were amplifying the very resonance of the Earth's hum, guiding our voices and our spirits into alignment with something greater than ourselves. Whether you were religious or not, in that moment, the music became a bridge, not just between us and our loved ones, but between time and space.

As we bring this understanding into our teaching, we recognize the profound responsibility we have to create a space where students can feel safe to tap into this vulnerable place. In MSOE, we cannot only theorize about this but put it into practice. The very structure of it allows us all to practice what it is like to have our own classroom, and I know that it has helped me work on and implement these exact philosophies in my teaching, which I am so grateful for.

Music, at its core, is about the soul expressing itself freely and passionately. For students to reach that point, they must feel supported and safe. A classroom environment that fosters trust and vulnerability is essential, as it is in these spaces where the truest forms of musical expression can flourish. Without this safety, we deny students the opportunity to access the depth of their own emotional and musical potential. Therefore, as educators, we must prioritize the creation of an environment where every student feels empowered to engage with music, not just as a skill but as a deeply personal, emotional experience that connects them to something timeless and larger than themselves.

MSOE Teaching Artists (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

Ethan Barker
Cameron Becker
Olivia Calzaretta
Kathryn Carlos
Zuzu Davis
Aundrea Dugas
Anna Dunn
Audrey Farrar
Madelynn Flanagan
Matthew Fox
Zeke Graf
Nick Hailey
Caelan Herk
Alexis Highland
Kailey Jeffs
Cameron Kregas
Michael Millan*
Mateo Novoa
Juno Okins
Gemma Petrucci
Elise Renner
Andrew Ressetar
Alex Strobel
Triston Told
Freya Underwood
Arjen Wynja
Olivia Zenzinger

MSOE Administrative Staff (CSU Faculty and Graduate Teaching Assistants*)

Dr. Erik Johnson
Dr. Seth Pendergast
Dr. Christina Herman
Paul Haarala*
Jessica Warner

Meet our Trying-on-Teaching High School Participants!

Raymundo Barrera
Jacob Brown
Collin Carlson
Melinda Fullenkamp
Kacy Larson
Maya Leisz
Brendan McKellar
Savannah Morris
Hayden Mosley
Alexis Nyambe
Ian Rose
Rayya Saleeby
Sienna Vogel

A Note About the Editor

Jessica Warner began her study of the oboe with Andrea Mather-Stow at the age of 10 in South Bend, Indiana. She made her solo debut at the age of 17 with the South Bend Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Warner holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and received her master's from the University of Texas at Austin. In addition, she has also studied the Aspen Summer Music Festival for three summers with John Mack, Joe Robinson, Jeannette Bittar, and Pedro Diaz. She has held the position as English hornist in the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Peoria Symphony, and oboist of Western Piedmont Symphony, Auckland Philharmonia, and Pontiac Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Warner has performed oboe and English horn with many orchestras throughout the United States and abroad, including Boulder Philharmonic, Greeley Philharmonic, Fort Collins Symphony, Cheyenne Symphony, Charlotte Symphony, Winston-Salem Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, South Bend Symphony, Illinois Symphony and Monterrey (Mexico) Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Warner has been working as administrative assistant to the Music Education Department at CSU for the past 6 years, where she has had the opportunity to work with the MSOE program and multiple other endeavors. She also works at Laurel Elementary School as the strings director, where she teaches orchestra and modern band to some amazingly talented young musicians. She spends her free time making modern band arrangements, gardening, cooking, and spending time with her lovely family. If you would like to contact Ms. Warner, please feel free to reach out at Jessica.Warner@colostate.edu

MSOE 2025 Rehearsal and Concert Schedule!

2025 MSOE Rehearsals:

Rehearsals take place on Wednesday evenings from 6-8 p.m.

- Wednesday, March 5: MSOE NIGHT 1
- Wednesday, March 12: MSOE NIGHT 2
- Wednesday, March 26: MSOE NIGHT 3
- Wednesday, April 2: MSOE NIGHT 4
- ***Saturday, April 5 (9 a.m. – 4 p.m.): MSOE Super Saturday Rehearsal***
- Wednesday, April 9: MSOE NIGHT 5
- Wednesday, April 16: MSOE NIGHT 6

MSOE Dress Rehearsal and Concert:

- Saturday, April 19, 2-8 p.m.