

Perceptions of the Singing Voice: Dr. S. J. Monks Susan Yarnall

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This study takes a multi-disciplinary approach to examine the layers of meaning given to vocal timbre when singers talk about their voices.

Three different approaches are taken for the Phase I exploration; semi-structured interviews with solo, choral, amateur and professional singers, questionnaires for school students and singing teachers featuring recordings of different vocal genres and diaries of the vocal experiences of professional singers.

Three aspects of vocal identity are discussed: reflection and construction of the voice and expression using the voice. A taxonomy of vocal development is created. The classification of metaphors describing vocal timbre provides a framework for discussion leading to Phase II. The concepts of space and movement are identified within the diary data of the professional singers.

Phase II focuses on data collected during the preparation of a specific recording task. The sample consists of 22 amateur solo singers, aged between 11 and 65 years from a variety of backgrounds and musical experience. Diary and interview discourse are classified and the importance of acoustic responses in the narratives of the more experienced singers is noted.

The reactions of singers to hearing the recording made of them singing highlight the differences between internally and externally perceived vocal timbres. Features indicate a tendency for the internally perceived timbre to be lower, richer and more mature than the sound heard externally. The different use of metaphor illustrates the levels of vocal perception taking place. The prominence of space and metaphor concepts is found in the discourse of more experienced performers in both Phase I and Phase II.

This study has implications for singers and teachers of singing. It offers a framework of metaphorical descriptions to facilitate the shared understanding of terms referring to vocal timbres and it suggests that the aural mismatch of sound and the role of auditory memory are important subjects for further investigation.

This work developed out of my Master's dissertation, also at Sheffield on Adolescent Voices and Vocal Identity and I have continued to explore these aspects of in post doctoral research with university undergraduate singers for Palatine (see [www](http://www.palatine.org).).

- ✓ Vocal Identity – explorer, performer, creator
- ✓ Vocal Timbre and the metaphorical language used to articulate it
- ✓ Auditory memory and the mismatch of internal and external feedback
- ✓ Assessment of the singing voice