

# Book Review Évaluation de livre



**Title:** Choral Pedagogy and the Older Singer

**Publisher:** Plural Publishing

**Authors:** Brenda Smith and Robert T. Sataloff

**Cost:** \$55.00 (softcover)

**ISBN:** 978-1-59756-438-0

**Reviewer:** Anick Lamarche

**Affiliation:** University of Ottawa

## Choral Pedagogy and the Older Singer

In an era where longevity is no longer the exception but rather the rule, increasing weight is given to the needs, interests and health of the geriatric population. We are only beginning to acquire more in-depth understanding of present-day aging and all that it entails. Voice science has helped map out the decades of voice, but many unknowns remain, especially with respect to geriatric voice habilitation. In this light, “Choral Pedagogy and the Older Singer” by Brenda Smith and Robert T. Sataloff looks to fill a gap by delving into topics such as the aged voice as a tool for activity and participation, and the art of singing throughout senescence. Indeed, research is scarce on the topic of choral activity in the elderly population. This scarcity is perhaps why it is strange that much of the extant research does not find a place in this book’s first chapter dedicated to research. Gunter, Grape, Theorell, Robertson and Gotell are all names that are left unmentioned despite the fact that these authors have investigated choir singing and well-being.

Geared to choral conductors, this book is presented as a textbook. Summaries and ‘further research questions’ are found at the end of each of the eight sections. The book’s style is eloquent and for the most part accessible, despite some occasional use of professional jargon. The book’s contents are ambitious

— ranging from personal experiences and anecdotes to medical definitions, anatomical orientation, an overview of integrative medicine and age-tied challenges affecting vocal output, choir diction and the rehearsal process.

Paradoxically, this book, which speaks of healthy harmony of older voices, contains dissonances on several different levels. One may question the elected structure with 1.5 page-long chapters and highly disjointed sections. Extensive time is spent visiting topics outside the scope of the voice in the elderly and choir pedagogy (i.e., Chapters 12 and 13). At times, the writing is redundant (i.e., Chapters 21 and 22 finish and start with an identical quote). Some chapters meet the standards of a textbook chapter with proper claim, support and citations, while other chapters make complete abstractions of referencing, or refer to vernacular sources such as media communications or films. In addition, definitions are at times left incomplete (vibrato is defined only by frequency modulations) or very late. One definition occurred 14 chapters after the term originally appeared. This makes it difficult for the reader to stay in tune with the book’s contents. Unfortunately, the lack of coherent structure, together with a slow pace of presentation (at times the book’s topic is addressed at the end of a chapter), hides the pearls of information this book has to offer.

Several chapters have very practical tokens for the reader, including:

1. Warm-up and cool-down routines and vocal regimen found in Chapters 7 and 25.
2. Important notes on prevention and habilitation at the end of Chapter 12.
3. Creative use of imagery proposed in Chapter 22.
4. Useful voice classification-related tips in Chapters 23 and 24.
5. Discussions on the need to establish new vocal models and recalibrate vocal percepts among older choristers in Chapters 22 and 25.

From a health care perspective, Chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17, on topics of seating ergonomics, vocal health and the older singer, integrative medicine, and general principles of training respectively, offer new perspectives, good illustrations of key principles, good construction and structure and all have topic-relevant take-home messages.

Generally, the book's illustrations are useful but could contain another level of information such as overall orientation to anatomical structures, or enhanced resolution and clarity so that arrows retain their functional role and are not lost in the image itself. For example, consistent angle display of the glottis could facilitate readership for those that may not be well versed in laryngeal anatomy.

All in all, this book will appeal to the reader interested in choral activity because many chapters provide practical information and tools to the conductor facing a "fifty plus" choir. The book also provokes some reflection with respect to the human connection to the voice and the need to dynamically rethink our vocal image for the elderly. From a health professional standpoint, a handful of chapters may be particularly insightful as they help draw attention to such basics as sitting, help reframe some therapeutic programming for the elderly population and suggest means to integrate holistic medicinal traditions with Western medical approaches.