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The Soloist as an Ensemble Singer

Morag Catriona Atchison

Abstract

My doctoral study is driven by my interest in choral music, ensemble repertoire for soloists, and the training of the choral musician in the New Zealand environment. Choral singing has for too long been seen as the poorer cousin of solo singing and therefore it is often overlooked in the training of young singers. If you look at the list of winners from New Zealand’s most prestigious singing competition, the Lexus Song Quest (formerly the Mobil Song Quest), an extraordinary number of these have sung in one of the national choirs or had an extensive choral training. Yet in spite of this, many young singers are discouraged from singing in a choir for fear that it will ruin their solo potential.

Through the music of five recitals I have explored the role of the soloist in the ensemble, from the music of Bach through to contemporary art music from New Zealand. The skills developed in the ensemble are vital for the solo singer. There is no question that singers entering the professional arena will spend a large part of their singing life in the ensemble context, whether it is as part of a chorus, a professional chamber choir, or ensemble singing in operas and oratorios. The purpose of my exegesis is to challenge the belief that a soloist should only be a soloist, and address many issues that surround soloists singing in choir, for example blend and vibrato. Through my recitals displaying the repertoire of the soloist and the ensemble singer in opera, chamber music and oratorio, I have promoted the ideal that a “well-trained” professional singer should be able to move seamlessly between the two worlds.
Dedication

For all those opera singers out there who love singing choral music.
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Glossary

Aria – a solo song usually found in opera.

Arietta – a small solo song, often of a few lines.

Arytenoids – the pair of cartilages attached to the vocal fold, these move to bring them together, or pull them apart.

Bel canto – meaning “beautiful singing,” a style of singing associated with nineteenth-century opera.

Blend – choral blend, ensemble blend, vocal blend – This term is used in ensemble singing to mean the unification of voices so individual voices do not dominate the sound.

Choral Singing Range – choral parts are divided into soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, with these divisions being the most common in a mixed-voice choir. Soprano I, Soprano II, Alto I, Alto II, Tenor I, Tenor II, Bass I and Bass II.

Coloratura – florid passages that require agility, most notably seen in the runs of baroque vocal writing.

Concertist – the members of an ensemble who sing the solo and chorus movements.

Cricoid – the ring-shaped cartilage at the base of the larynx.

Cricoarytenoid muscles – these move the arytenoids to bring the vocal folds together and apart.

Cricothyroid – The intrinsic paired muscle between the cricoid and thyroid cartilages.

Cry – this vocal quality is produced with a tilted larynx, thin vocal folds, and a raised soft palate.

Fach, Fächer – a German system used to describe the different voice classifications in opera. This classification determines the roles singers will perform.

Soprano    Soubrette, Lyric coloratura, Dramatic coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Character, Dramatic, Wagnerian.

Mezzo-soprano Coloratura, Lyric, Dramatic, Dramatic contralto.

Tenor    Buffo, Character, Lyric, Youthful Heldentenor, Heldentenor.
*Baritone*  Lyric, Cavalier-baritone, Character, Helden, Lyric bass-baritone, Dramatic bass-baritone, Baritone Martyn.

*Bass*  Lyric bass-baritone, High dramatic bass, Young bass, Lyric buffo, Bass-baritone, Basso profondo.

**Fundamental** – the perceived pitch.

**Harmonics** – the wave of frequencies above the fundamental note.

**International Phonetic Alphabet** – a system of symbols and letters to describe how to pronounce a sound in any language. These are the key symbols used for Italianate vowels.

- [a] – bright a
- [ɑ] – dark a
- [e] – closed e
- [ɛ] – open e
- [i] – “eee”
- [ɛ] – open o
- [ɔ] – closed o
- [u] – “ooo”
- [ə] – *schwa*, a neutral sound

**Larynx** – the organ in the neck housing the vocal folds and surrounding cartilages.

Commonly called the “voicebox.”

**Melisma** – refers to singing one syllable of text over a number of notes.

**Messa di voce** – a vocal exercise where the singer works on dynamic control, usually as a crescendo—decrescendo.

**Opera buffa** – comic opera.

**Opera seria** – serious opera.

**Overtones** – the harmonics above the fundamental note.

**Passagio** – *primo and secondo* – between each vocal register is a “break” or transition point. The *primo passagio* refers to the transition point between chest and middle, and the *secondo passagio* is the transition point between middle and head.

**Pharynx** – a term to describe the larynx, oral cavity and nasal cavity.

**Recitative** – sung speech in opera and oratorio.
Registers – voices typically have three registers, chest, middle and head. Each of these registers has its own vocal quality.

Ripienist – the section of the choir who sing the parts marked ripieno, chorales, and any movements where the choral parts require more voices.

Stapedius muscle – a small muscle in the ear that contracts to dampen loud noises.

Studio technique, studio voice – the style of singing a student works on with their voice teacher for their solo studies.

Sob – a soft dark sound produced by a lowered larynx and thin vocal folds.

Subglottic pressure – is the air pressure underneath the vocal folds that allow them to open and close. An even subglottic pressure allows the voice to vibrate freely.

Singer’s Formant – the frequency range 2400Hz – 3200Hz that gives the ring in a singer’s voice.

Soft palate – the soft tissue at the back of the mouth that rises to close off the nasal passages.

Thin fold – a term used to describe when a singer uses the edge of the vocal fold to produce sound.

Thick fold – a term used to describe when a singer uses the full mass of the vocal fold to produce sound.

Thyroid – the cartilage at the front of the larynx, usually called the “Adam’s Apple.”

Tilt – a term used to describe the tilting of the thyroid cartilage in order to successfully move through the passagio and add colour to the voice.

Tremolo – a wide vibrato.

Twang – this forward, bright sound, often using nasal resonance, is commonly heard in the vocal production of music theatre and country music singers. The sound is produced with a small vocal tract and a raised larynx.

Thyroarytenoid muscle – a paired intrinsic muscle that makes up the vocal folds.

Upperpartials – the upper harmonics of a sound.
**Vocal cord** – the pair of muscles in the larynx that vibrate to produce sound (old term).

**Vocal fold** – the pair of muscles in the larynx that vibrate to produce sound.

**Vocal mechanism** – a term to describe the organs involved in the production of sound.

**Vocalis** – the medial part of the thyroarytenoid muscle.

**Vibrato** – the oscillation of pitch of a single note. Usually between six and seven undulations per second, and with a variation of no greater than a semitone.

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**Abbreviations**

- **ABRSM**    Associated Boards of the Royal Schools’ of Music
- **AIS**      Advanced Instrumental Skills
- **CMNZ**     Chamber Music New Zealand
- **GSMD**     Guildhall School of Music and Drama
- **IPA**      International Phonetic Alphabet
- **NCM**      National Choir Members
- **NZSO**     New Zealand Symphony Orchestra
- **NZSSC**    New Zealand Secondary Students’ Choir
- **NZYC**     New Zealand Youth Choir
- **RAM**      Royal Academy of Music
- **RCM**      Royal College of Music
Introduction

This research focuses on the need for an emphasis on ensemble training for solo singers by looking at the role of the soloist in ensemble in oratorio, opera and chamber music.¹ As a professional singer based in New Zealand, I spend much of my time singing in ensembles, whether it be in opera, oratorio or as part of a chamber ensemble, and as a pedagogue I encourage my pupils to sing in choirs. But for years there has been much antagonism between the singing teacher and the choral conductor, with the perception that solo singers should not be choristers as it will affect their solo technique.² For some young singers who want to study singing at a tertiary level, a lack of ensemble skills can be a hindrance to their studies.

I was fortunate enough as a secondary school student to receive a strong choral education, but at university, my renowned singing teacher was reluctant to let her students sing in choirs. Furthermore, I found that there was a perception that the performance students’ voices were “too big” for choral ensembles. However, when I began my postgraduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), all students were required to audition for the RAM Chamber Choir. This was fundamentally a choir of soloists and despite the fact that most opera singers will sing at some point in the chorus³ (any soloist who wishes to sing Mozart will need to learn the intricacies of ensemble singing), Professors at the RAM were reluctant to let their students sing in the choir.

This doctoral exegesis investigates, through the repertoire for a solo singer performing in an ensemble setting, how as a singer and singing teacher in New Zealand I can address the antagonism between the choral and the solo worlds. New Zealand is highly regarded in its choral music training and performing, and is well known for producing high-calibre professional singers. Many of these singers have been trained in choirs. Historically, New Zealand vocal and choral education is based on the British model,⁴ “…the choral sound, aesthetic, and repertoire were from the finest English cathedral tradition.”⁵ However, with the work of pioneering vocal pedagogues, William Vennard and Richard Miller, and increasing numbers of students going to

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¹ Refer to Appendix 2, page 118 for the programmes of my five Doctoral Recitals.
² Miller, On the Art of Singing, 57; Sundberg, The Science of the Singing Voice, 141.
³ As a young singer in the UK, many singers start their professional life in the chorus of opera companies like Glyndebourne Festival Opera or English Touring Opera. Glyndebourne’s own publicity for its Festival Chorus states that “For many the Glyndebourne Chorus provides the much needed transition from opera course at a conservatory to the professional world, with the opportunity to understudy roles in the Festival and on Tour, and in some cases leading to engagement in a principal role on tour and later in the Festival.”
⁴ Simpson, Hallelujahs and History, 9; Thomson, New Zealand Music, 268.
⁵ Grylls, “The (ch)oral traditions of Oceania,” 181.
the USA for their postgraduate training, the American model is being explored. These choral and operatic pathways seem to overlap more and more, yet there is still resistance from singers and singing teachers alike.

There is much in the literature from writers and pedagogues Darryl Edwards, Julian Davids, Stephen LaTour, Margaret Olson, Brenda Smith, Robert Sataloff to suggest that choral singing is beneficial to vocal and aural musicianship. Most of the research on vocal performance from Elizabeth Ekholm, Thomas Rossing, Johan Sundberg, Sten Ternström, Katherine Reid and Janice Chapman is on spectral differences between solo and choral singing, and Allen Goodwin’s study on how pedagogical “…approaches requiring singers to modify their solo vocal production for the sake of ensemble blend have sometimes led to controversy among choral directors and voice teachers.” As Richard Miller argues, “In point of fact, for the voice major or the professional singer, the threat to vocal health in choral singing lies not in decibel competition but in attempting to submerge the voice into the surrounding bland sound.” More recent researchers Scott McCoy, Jean Callaghan, Jo Estill and Donald Gray Miller have looked at voice training through spectral analysis. But why are singers modifying their technique? Surely singing is singing, and it is the style, not the technique that changes.

The contexts which draw together my recitals and this exegesis focus on the musical material and technical issues that a soloist and choral singer will encounter throughout their performing life. Throughout this exegesis I will discuss how the musical environment for the New Zealand-based singer highlights the need for soloists to ensure that their training encompasses solo and ensemble music.

Oratorio is often the first port of call in the professional life of a young singer and the first time they get paid to sing an aria. Moreover, “authentic” performances of baroque oratorio require the singer to be both a soloist and a choral singer, taking on the role of the concertist. This was an important feature of Bach’s music and has become the source of much debate surrounding the

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6 It is not the intent of this exegesis to discuss the choral and vocal traditions, rather to acknowledge their influence on New Zealand singing.
7 Davids and LaTour, Vocal Technique, 6-7.
8 Davids and LaTour, 6-7; Edwards, “Music Makers,” 36-37; Olson, Solo Singer, 119-121; Willcocks, “Choral and Vocal Ensemble,” 240-241; Smith and Sataloff, Choral Pedagogy, 129-130.
11 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 58.
12 McCoy, Your Voice; Jean Callaghan, Singing and Voice Science; MacDonald Klimek, Estill Voice Training System; Miller, Resonance in Singing.
13 See glossary.
performance practice of Bach oratorios. It is not just in the music of Bach that the worlds of the soloist and chorister collide, since modern works by Tippett and Pärt also expect the soloists to have highly developed ensemble skills as well. Stylistic modifications are also the norm in modern repertoire, in which the soloist is expected to blend into the sound rather than sitting on top of it.

Singers in the early stages of their studies rarely perform operatic arias. They mainly sing ensemble repertoire and small operatic roles that may have an arietta\(^\text{14}\) of a few lines.\(^\text{15}\) Of course young singers must study arias and roles, but in many universities, the performance of operatic ensembles and duets is often limited to students who are assigned roles in operas, or students who are self-motivated enough to arrange their own ensemble groups. In the university I work at, 2012 has been the first year that an ensemble class has formally been offered as part of performance skills, the students study recitative\(^\text{16}\) and operatic ensembles. Student singers will of course sing in choirs, and while we would never require them to sing a solo aria that is well beyond them technically, choristers are constantly expected to sing repertoire that is far more difficult than the average aria. This results in singing teachers discouraging students from singing chorally because of vocal fatigue. My operatic recital “The Operatic Heroine” displayed a variety of arias, with a few duets and ensembles, highlighting the enormous range and variety of technical skills that can be expected of even an inexperienced choral soprano. This recital crossed many Fächer,\(^\text{17}\) eras, and styles; a professional soprano would never normally be expected to do this in one concert.

One of the major challenges facing the trained soloist in the ensemble is dealing with vibrato and vocal blend and an obvious, yet not often used solution, is for the singer to “sing out of part,” allowing a freedom of technique without compromising the ensemble sound. Vibrato and consequently ensemble blend has been one of the most contentious issues in relation to a soloistic voice singing in a choir.\(^\text{19}\) Vocal pedagogues believe that singing without vibrato is an unhealthy sound\(^\text{20}\) and results in tension throughout the vocal mechanism.\(^\text{21}\) I discuss the current and past research regarding the main issues hindering a singer from being a chorister and a soloist; vibrato, blend, resonance and the perception of the individual in a choral group or ensemble.

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\(^{14}\) See glossary.
\(^{15}\) The role of Barbarina in Mozart’s Le nozze di Figaro is one such example. She sings an arietta “L’ho perduta,” as well as ensembles and recitative.
\(^{16}\) See glossary.
\(^{17}\) See glossary.
\(^{18}\) See chapter 4, page 60.
\(^{19}\) Davids and LaTour, Vocal Technique, 133-135.
\(^{20}\) Miller, On the Art of Singing; Edwards, “No vibrato”; Cunningham, e-mail message to author, November 14, 2012.
\(^{21}\) See glossary.
In my own choral singing, I sing as an alto rather than as soprano due to the harmonic makeup of my voice. By looking at the harmonic structure of leading New Zealand mezzo-soprano Kate Spence’s voice, it is possible to see why it is conceivable for a solo soprano to function as an alto chorally; chapter 4 “There’s a soprano in the altos!” discusses this at length. I, along with other pedagogues have advised young singers to sing ‘out of their voice part’ so they can gain the benefits of choral training without compromising their developing vocal technique.

Three of my doctoral recitals focussed on the complexities of chamber music, from art song to a work for vocal quartet and piano trio. The skills needed for chamber music are vast. The singer must be able to sing as a soloist, in partnership with a pianist, with instrumentalists, and as part of a vocal ensemble. For many singers, these skills are often overlooked especially if they have not sung in a choral group. Chamber music is where singers learn the basics of their craft, language, vocal line, and story-telling. Young singers, however, typically only want to focus on operatic arias and become opera stars. As Rufus Hallmark, Professor of Music at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, observes:

*The lied constitutes a large body of music, touted in music history texts and specialized studies (vested interest one might argue), but otherwise oddly neglected. Young singers would generally prefer to move up to opera; song is the spinach they have to eat as growing children (though ironically, few of them will make it to the opera stage).*

My chamber music recitals demonstrated the skills required and the essential nature of these skills for someone wanting to be a solo singer.

There is still a general assumption that choral music is unsuited to the vocal techniques of the soloists and vice versa, creating tension between the vocal disciplines and contributing to the belief in the wider musical community that choral singers do not sing “properly” and that solo singers are not “proper” musicians. Does the focus on solo performance in singing teaching, particularly amongst younger musicians, undermine the musicianship and vocal development of those singers who do not (or do not wish to) have a solo career, but actively choose choral

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23 Ensemble vocal skills encompass the ability to understand harmonic context, ability to listen to others, good sightreading, being able to follow a conductor, and knowing when you are the important voice, and when you are not. These are learnt in the ensemble, not the studio.
24 Rufus E. Hallmark, *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, x.
singing? And does this situation consequently create a hierarchy amongst musical genres in the music academy? For many singers choral singing is their first introduction to singing. Both Luciano Pavarotti\textsuperscript{26} and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa\textsuperscript{27} had a background in choral singing and many of New Zealand’s most successful singers have sung in the New Zealand National Youth Choir (NZYC).\textsuperscript{28} From my position as an experienced voice teacher, choral and ensemble singing is integral to the vocal and musical development of all singers, and when ensemble singing is deliberately avoided in the training of a young singer it severely impacts their musical progress. A strong instrumental background is certainly advantageous; Richard Miller said that “[w]ithout doubt, the development of basic keyboard skills is a decisive plus for the singing musician.”\textsuperscript{29}

Not all singers will learn the piano, but all singers can and should sing in a choir or ensemble.

In 2012 I undertook a pilot study at The University of Auckland looking at the musical background of student singers and how this had affected their musicianship skills.\textsuperscript{30} Unfortunately only a small cohort was willing to participate in the study, an indication perhaps of how singers perceive their own musical skills. The initial results, while inconclusive, found that those with a strong choral background were much better at sightsinging than their colleagues, including those who had a strong instrumental background, even if the overall test scores were not appreciably different from those who lacked this background.

This research shows that it is now advantageous for singers to be versatile and be equally trained as soloists and ensemble singers. As a singing teacher at university level, I believe that we should be more open to teaching a technique that encompasses solo, ensemble, and choral repertoire equally, with the same intrinsic value placed on each discipline. In my view it is time for music academies to encourage the possibility of their singers working as professional choristers rather than just “opera stars.”

\textsuperscript{26} Pavarotti sang as a teenager in a male choir section at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. Attenburrow, Fifty Glorious Weeks.

\textsuperscript{27} Dame Kiri Te Kanawa sang as a school-girl in the St Mary’s School Choir, Ponsonby, Auckland, NZ. Harris, Kiri, 19.

\textsuperscript{28} Refer to Appendix 4, page 125 for a full list.

\textsuperscript{29} Miller, Solutions for Singers, 198.

\textsuperscript{30} Study is found in Appendix 1, page 102. See also chapter 5, page 97.
Oratorio\(^1\) is defined as “an extended musical setting of sacred, usually non-liturgical text [...] [T]he forms and styles of oratorio tend to approximate those of opera in any given period [...] without scenery, costumes or action.”\(^2\) It is a vocal art form in which the solo and choral worlds collide on a regular basis and is often the first place that young singers begin their careers as professional soloists.\(^3\) In displaying these worlds through a recital, I chose a programme that would juxtapose solo arias with a range of small and large ensemble combinations selected from oratorio repertoire, highlighting the role of the concertist and ripienist.\(^4\) These two terms can be used equally in the music of J. S. Bach and Arvo Pärt. This recital demonstrated the variety of vocal contexts in which the professional New Zealand singer often performs despite a training centred around a professional life on the operatic stage. Within the New Zealand musical fraternity there is still a divide between the expectations of the solo singer and the members of the choir; however, ensembles such as Voices New Zealand and Viva Voce are beginning to challenge this idea.

Although the roots of oratorio began in Italy with Carissimi, the pinnacle of the genre is found in the music of Great Britain and the German-speaking nations, with Bach, Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn. This was the music upon which New Zealand’s public music-making was founded in the nineteenth century, and it is still the music we most often hear at New Zealand choral concerts. For instance, the first fully-performed work by the Auckland Choral Society was Handel’s *Messiah* on December 17, 1857.\(^5\)

Then as now, soloists can be highly-trained professional singers, or competent members of the choir, and this has created hotly-contested ground over which arguments about vocal quality, style, and performance expectations are fought. When soloists enter into the realm of oratorio they need to be able to multi-task. There is of course the traditional role of the

---

1 In this chapter I have chosen to use the word “oratorio” to encompass oratorio, the passions and sacred cantatas, in the same way that a singer would if referring to the whole genre. In singing competitions, the oratorio class allows music from oratorio, passions and sacred cantatas to be presented.


3 My first major professional performance was Bach’s *St John Passion*, with the Auckland Choral Society conducted by Peter Watts in 1996.

4 See glossary.

soloist in the solo arias, but singers also need to be skilled in the art of oratory, ensemble singing and choral singing. A professional singer can be hired as a soloist or an ensemble singer, either as the concertist or the ripienist. Each of these roles is equally important, but today’s music programmes focus on the “solo” art of singing relinquishing training in many of these other skills. This often results in young singers ill-equipped to perform on the professional stage despite the fact that singing oratorio is one of their first professional jobs. In addition, while the bass, tenor and even alto soloists step freely across the solo and choral divide, the soprano soloist is a unique case, often kept at arm’s length from the choir. The soprano is the top-line in choral literature, and therefore the most prominent sound. Unlike the lower voices, where a large-voiced singer can ‘hide’, a richer-voiced soprano with a soloist’s colour certainly cannot. As a soprano gets higher, the harmonics in the voice in turn get higher and dominate the sound, and if these are developed for solo repertoire, it is very hard and often dangerous to ‘turn them off.’ The choral soprano line is limited in range and commonly sits on the secondo passagio; this is tiring for a singer without a secure technique. For a soprano to sing with a straight-tone or so-called choral-tone, and in a limited range, the singer is required to “…tighten the throat and raise the larynx…” resulting in an impaired technique and vocal fatigue.

In the world of oratorio, a soloist needs to be flexible about the repertoire and styles he or she chooses to sing, and adapt to the demands of ensemble singing as required. Unlike the operatic world and its fach system, we find in oratorio large voices singing baroque music and small voices singing romantic music. Consequently, it is usual in performance to keep operatically-trained soloists from singing in the ensemble, in this way avoiding the need to blend singers with an overt operatic quality into a group of chorally-trained singers. My recital that I now discuss, demonstrates that this practice is archaic and that opera singers can blend into a choral group “…enhanc[ing] the quality of the choir.” My recital highlights the need for professional soloists in the twenty-first century to possess choral skills.

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6 Recitatives in oratorio, despite being set to music, require the singer to orate rather than sing. Quantz famously said “Musical execution may be compared with the delivery of an orator.” Quantz, On Playing, 119.
7 See glossary
8 Chipman, Singing with Mind, Body and Soul, 141.
9 Ibid., 142.
The Recital Programme

The recital followed themes based on the crucifixion and “the mother” looking for comfort in “this world of destruction,” but also showcased the music, in my own experience, that is most often sung by professional sopranos in New Zealand—the oratorio and choral music of England, Italy and Germany. This music encompasses baroque through to contemporary art music, highly-operatic arias, oratory, Arvo Pärt’s four-part minimalism, and unaccompanied ensemble singing.

Historically, the music of Bach, and Bach’s model for his Passions and oratorios was the inspiration for many composers. Mendelssohn revived the *Matthäus-Passion* in 1829, Tippett’s *A Child of Our Time* was based on the Bach oratorio formula, and Pärt’s *Berliner Messe* gives us a new perspective on the flexibility of the size of ensemble since it was written to be performed by four soloists or choir. My oratorio recital, however, had less to do with the individual stylistic demands and performance practice of each piece, but rather how a small number of soloists in New Zealand are required to sing a vast range of material. This music can be radically changed by the vocal quality and performance experience of the performers, all while trying to meet the performance demands and colour choices of the conductor.

In the modern era “[w]e typically divide singers into two categories, chorus members and soloists;” in Bach’s time, however, this was not so. As musicologist Daniel Melamed explains, “…all the evidence suggests that Bach’s aria singers (the “soloists”) were the chorus.” Two terms were used to denote the role of the singer, the *concertist*, and *ripienist*. It is essential to understand these terms and explore why there is so much conjecture surrounding modern-day performances of Bach, since the roles implicit in these terms influence the approach soloists take in learning a piece of oratorio, whether it is Bach or Tippett. It is understood that *concertists* “performed ‘solo’ and ‘choral’ numbers without distinction,” and the *ripienists* added to the colour of the choir, whether in

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11 Minimalism, which began in the 1960s, is described by Nick Strimple as “…a style incorporating the simplest kind of diatonic harmonies coupled with hypnotic rhythmic structures.” Strimple, “Choral music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,” 49.
14 Daniel Melamed, Professor of Music (Musicology) at the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington.
separate ripieno lines or chorales or to help give more impact to a certain chorus. Scholars and musicians alike, including Andrew Parrott and Daniel Melamed, suggest that it is too easy today to equate the *ripienist* with today’s chorister and the *concertist* with the soloist. In fact the “…role of *ripienists*…was merely to *reinforce* – and not to replace – the *concertists* at certain points.” Melamed commented further saying that:

> Concertists had to be more skilled – they sang solo arias as well as choruses – but they did not sit with their hands folded smiling beatifically during choruses because they were the principal singers of those movements, and sometimes the only ones.

Since the soloist of today is always educated in the art of singing solo arias, a problem arises when they are asked to become part of the ensemble, taking the role of the *concertist* and/or *ripienist*. As Chester L. Alwes writes in his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*, “[c]ontemporary Western notions of choral singing are a nineteenth century invention.” The Lutheran Tradition of the small seventeenth century choir of one voice per part “…in which Bach’s music has its roots…” is a far cry from the 1784 Handel Commemorations at Westminster Abbey where the choir and orchestra numbered 525. With the large scale oratorios of Mendelssohn, the notion of what constitutes a choir had changed. The role of the soloist had also changed, from the soloist inside the ensemble to the soloist at the front of the stage.

The works I chose for my recital by Pergolesi, Handel, Mozart and Rossini are regularly sung in New Zealand, and it is common for the singers to take on the role of the *concertist* and *ripienist* whether they realise it or not. The Pergolesi *Stabat Mater*, Handel’s *Solomon*, Mozart’s *Requiem* and Rossini’s *Petite messe solenelle* are performed by choirs and soloists alike, with the lines between them often blurred. They are also often sung by young singers not ready to take on the technical demands of each piece or by singers who are well versed in the art of solo singing, but do not have the requisite skills to sing in an ensemble. Here I will look at some of the performed works and their technical demands.

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17 Englishman Andrew Parrott is the director of the highly acclaimed Taverner Choir and Orchestra and is well known as a musicologist, most notably for his book *The Essential Bach Choir* (2000).
22 Temperley, "London (i)."
Pergolesi: Stabat Mater

Pergolesi’s final work, the *Stabat Mater* (1735/6), first published in 1749, achieved considerable fame and popularity in the eighteenth-century. Pergolesi’s work was criticized by many scholars, including Padre Martini, claiming it was too operatic in its writing.\(^{24}\) This operatic claim is largely due to the lack of a chorus, it was originally conceived for soprano and alto solo. The first three movements that I performed show three very different styles of writing from Pergolesi. The first movement is a canon-like duet in f minor\(^{25}\)

“…generating momentum by unfolding a chain of dissonances requiring resolution.\(^{26}\) [1.1]
The second, *Cujus animam* a soprano solo, confuses the listener and singer alike, with syncopated rhythm and the use of trills juxtaposing the tragic words *Cujus animam gementem, contristatam et dolentum, pertransivit gladius.*\(^{27}\) The third, *O quam tristis* is a homophonic duet with falling lines echoing the sadness of Mary.

**EXAMPLE 1.1** Pergolesi, *Stabat mater,* “Stabat mater,” bars 12-17

The *Stabat Mater* has become part of the standard repertoire for any Treble voice choir,\(^{28}\) and movements are often sung by school choirs. This does not in any way diminish the difficulty of the music. Often choral directors and singing teachers require music for their students that is reasonably easy to learn, leaving the mature technical issues to be addressed at a later stage in the singers’ vocal development. For any seasoned professional the opening phrase of the work, with its chains of suspensions, make this an exercise in breath control, beauty of line and ability to blend with the other singer.

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\(^{25}\) Johann Mattheson in *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (1713) describes f minor as “deep and heavy with despair,” Jean-Phillipe Rameau in *Traité de l’harmonie* (1722), as having the quality of “tenderness and plaints,” and Johann Joachimm Quantz in *On Playing the Flute* (1752), as “melancholy...mournful.”

\(^{26}\) Will, “Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater,*” 571.

\(^{27}\) Whose soul, lamenting, sorrowing and grieving, has been pierced by the sword. Pinkerton, “Texts and Translations.”

\(^{28}\) A choir of sopranos and altos whether they be children or adults.
Handel: Solomon

Handel’s 1748 oratorio Solomon is written in an operatic style with extended recitative dialogue between the parts and includes a number of ensembles including “My Sov’regn Liege….Words are weak to paint my fear.” This piece shows the dramatic singing style needed by each singer and unlike the intertwining duet writing from the first movement of the Stabat Mater, the trio of soloists sing three very independent parts focussing on their own part of the story. Solomon requires a large orchestra with strings, flutes, oboes, bassoons, horns, trumpets and timpani, “[t]he use of full brass and an extra body of ripieno strings in the orchestra, coupled with writing for double chorus, gives the music special power and colour.” However, in the tradition of many regional oratorio performances, I performed this excerpt with the organ accompaniment, since it is in this manner that a young soloist often performs an oratorio.

Mozart: Requiem

The circumstances surrounding the writing of Mozart’s Requiem are famous and have been the source of much discussion and debate. There is debate too as to how many singers should be employed for a performance of Mozart’s Requiem. “The number of singers in choirs in the Classical period varied considerably,” and “…a first performance of Mozart’s Requiem in Leipzig in 1794 could muster only two dozen choristers from St Thomas’s. Yet just six years later, in a commemorative concert after the death of Fasch, more than a hundred voices for the same Requiem was not thought inappropriate.” However, the “Recordare” has always been a movement for soloists, whether they stood out from the choir or not. In it is everything that one would expect from a solo quartet – polyphonic and homophonic writing, solo phrases and duets – all the elements a soloist needs to be skilled in. Decker writes that in the classical period musicians such as Charles Burney, Johann Joachim Quantz and Pier Francesco Tosti believed that voices should be

29 Hicks, “Handel, George Frideric.”
30 A recent performance of the work in Auckland, New Zealand by Viva Voce was an excellent example of the soloist as an ensemble singer. Apart from the role of Solomon, all other roles were taken by singers who stepped out from the choir; the lines between the soloist and chorister were blurred but the skill of each soloist was confirmed.
31 Garretson, Choral Music, 87.
32 Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch, 1736-1800. German conductor and composer, most importantly known for reviving the art of choral singing in Germany.
clear-toned, agile, pure, and that when singing high, the singer should not sing loudly.\textsuperscript{34} This is especially important for the soprano to remember when singing Mozart quartets: she should not be the dominant sound, but be part of the texture.

\textit{Rossini: Petite messe solennelle}

Rossini’s \textit{Petite messe solennelle}, written when Rossini lived in Paris, is perhaps one of the finest examples of a nineteenth-century chamber mass. It was originally written for twelve singers, four of whom would step out of the choir and sing the solo parts. The accompaniment was originally written for two pianos and harmonium, and Rossini later scored it for orchestra. Fortunately for my accompanist,\textsuperscript{35} the “O salutaris,” which was added later, only requires the accompaniment of a piano; Harmoniums of Rossini’s time are very hard to come by and difficult to play. An 1868 Brandus & Dufour edition\textsuperscript{36} of the score printed “O salutaris” as an alto aria in E major, and it is not until the 1869 Ricordi edition\textsuperscript{37} that it is assigned to the soprano with a change of tonality to G major. This aria is extremely operatic in its writing, as is much of the choral writing, and requires the singer to show a wide range of dynamics, long melismatic phrases and accuracy in singing chromatic phrases. With the choral and solo writing ranging from \textit{pianissimo, sotto voce,} to \textit{fortissimo,} the demands on the soloist are as great as any operatic role.

\textit{Mendelssohn: Elijah}

\textit{Elijah} is oratorio in its most romanticised form and conforms to the modern ideal of an oratorio, with the large chorus, orchestra, and soloists sitting at the front. It contains arias with sweeping phrases and declamatory sections, grand choruses, solo quartet and choir movements, and an exquisite unaccompanied trio. The first performance took place in Birmingham on August 26, 1846 [Figure 1.1] and along with the four soloists “… [it] was on a large scale: an orchestra of 125, 93 strings and doubled woodwind; 79 sopranos, 60 altos (all male), 60 tenors and 72 basses.”\textsuperscript{38} The soprano aria “Hear Ye Israel” is Mendelssohn at his most dramatic, poignant, and challenging. After the first rehearsal the soloist Jenny Lind asked for it to be taken down a tone proclaiming that “it was not a lady’s song”!\textsuperscript{39} The threat of replacing her kept the aria intact. The problem for the soloist comes when singing the “Terzetto.” The first soprano and alto soloists are there as part of the solo line-up; however the second soprano is invariably drawn from the choir and unless the

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{34} Schrok, “Performance Practice,” 282-283.
    \item \textsuperscript{35} Dean Sky-Lucas, Head of Collaborative Piano, The University of Auckland.
    \item \textsuperscript{36} Rossini, “Petite messe solennelle,” 1868.
    \item \textsuperscript{37} Rossini, “Petite messe solennelle,” 1869.
    \item \textsuperscript{38} Pilkington, \textit{Mendelssohn Elijah}, viii.
    \item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
performance is with a professional ensemble, it is likely that there will be balance issues and the second soprano part barely audible. With the first and often only rehearsal happening on the day of the performance,\(^{40}\) it is up to the soprano and alto soloist to be mindful of this and allow the second soprano part to be as important as they are. It is important to remember that it is often the clear-voiced chorally trained second soprano who is keeping the other soloists in tune.


Figure 1.1 Removed for copyright reasons.

*Bach: Matthäus-Passion*

It is J. S. Bach’s *Matthäus-Passion* that provides the theoretic basis for this chapter. The recent musical arguments over how both *Matthäus-Passion* and the *Johannes-Passion* should be performed illustrate the issues facing soloists when required to move back and forth across the solo/choral divide in all forms of oratorio. In the past, being asked to sing the *Matthäus-Passion* was an easy proposition for a soloist. Singers knew that they would

\(^{40}\) In my experience this is more commonplace in England than New Zealand.
be singing the solo arias for their voice part, or sing the Evangelist or Christus, and perhaps
the final “Amen.” The biggest question would be modern or baroque pitch and whether the
work is performed in English or German.\footnote{A fellow student from the RAM/RCM Opera Course 1999-2001, soprano Rachel Nicholls toured the Netherlands with Bach Choir and Orchestra of The Netherlands conducted by Pieter Jan Leusink in performances of the St Matthew Passion in Dutch in 2012. Black, “Rachel Nicholls.”} Now there are so many different possible
permutations of the performance that the soloist could be singing some or all of the choir parts and it could even be staged as an opera.

On March 20, 2002, I attended a performance of the Matthäus-Passion at St John’s Smith Square, London, conducted by Paul McCreesh with eight soloists and one ripieno soprano. It was a stunning performance; I heard Bach in a way that I never had before. It was
personal and direct, but whether it was true to the intentions of the composer was obviously
an impossible question to answer. Little did I know then, but this performance was the
culmination of twenty years of heated academic debate on the subject.

In 1730 J. S. Bach wrote his \textit{Kurtzer, iedoch höchstenöthiger Entwurf einer wohlbestallten}
Kirchen Music; nebst einigem unvorgreiflichen Bedencken von dem Verfall derselben\footnote{Neumann and Schulze, \textit{Bach-Dokumente}, 60.} [Short But Most Necessary Draft for a Well-Appointed Church Music, with Certain Modest Reflections on the Decline of the Same], more commonly known as the \textit{Entwurf}. It has
become one of the most debated of all of Bach’s writings and my model for discussing the
role of the singer in oratorio. In the \textit{Entwurf} Bach appeals to the Town Council of Leipzig
for more funds in order to be able to perform music at the highest levels in the Leipzig
Churches. The \textit{Entwurf} is recognised as one of the most important documents written by
Bach as it discusses the numbers of singers and musicians he considered necessary for his
performances, giving performers of today an insight into the conditions he was working
under, and demonstrating how this influenced the musicians he used. In 1981 the American
conductor and founder of the highly acclaimed Bach Ensemble, Joshua Rifkin,\footnote{Oron, “Joshua Rifkin.”} wrote an
article for the American Musicological Society\footnote{Rifkin, “Bach’s Chorus,” 754.} advancing the idea that Bach’s ideal
model for his passions, and many of his other works, was for one per part. This sent
shockwaves through the early music community and soon this debate was joined by the
academic Robert Marshall\footnote{Academic Robert Marshall is the Louis, Frances and Jeffrey Sachar Professor of Music Emeritus at Brandeis University in Boston, MA, and has won many accolades for his writings on Baroque music, with emphasis on J. S. Bach. \textit{Brandeis University Faculty Guide.}} who refuted Rifkin’s claims. The conductor and musicologist
Andrew Parrott sided with Rifkin and the Dutch harpsichordist Ton Koopman\textsuperscript{46} with Marshall.

From 1723-1750, J. S. Bach was the Director of Music and Cantor at the Thomasschule and Thomaskirche in Leipzig. He was the school’s music teacher and responsible for organising the music at services at the Thomaskirche as well as the Nikolaikirche, the Neuen Kirche and the Peterskirche.\textsuperscript{47} According to the Entwurff, Bach was concerned with the lack of financial support he was getting from the Leipzig Town Council in order to be able to fulfil the requirements of his job. He did not have enough singers and instrumentalists of a sufficient standard to be able to perform all of the music he was responsible for providing. At the time of writing he had 55 students at the Thomasschule divided into four choirs. He states that those singing in the Thomaskirche, Nikolaikirche, and Neüen Kirche “must all be musical”\textsuperscript{48} and that Peterskirche will receive the “residue...those who do not understand music and can only just barely sing a chorale.”\textsuperscript{49}

His request is for four concertists, though sometimes eight for double choir works, and eight ripienists in each choir, though there should be at least “3 sopranos, 3 altos, 3 tenors, and as many basses, so that even if one happens to fall ill (as very often happens, particularly at this time of year, as the prescriptions written by the school physician for the apothecary must show) at least a double-chorus motet may be sung.”\textsuperscript{50} So where did this notion of Rifkin’s one singer per part argument come from? The term coro was used in eighteenth-century opera to describe “a brief homophonic ensemble sung by the all the soloists,”\textsuperscript{51} and composers such as Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) used the term coro favorita\textsuperscript{52} or favoured choir for a small ensemble, sometimes numbering only four. Bach would have been familiar with this terminology and considered a choir or coro of four soloists as perfectly acceptable.

Nonetheless, it is obvious from reading the Entwurff that Bach himself wanted sixteen per choir, implying two to a part even in a work for double chorus. Robert Marshall argues this very case in his 1983 reply to Rifkin’s “bold thesis”\textsuperscript{53} in The Musical Times. He believes,

\textsuperscript{46} Ton Koopman is a prizewinning harpsichordist and founder of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Amsterdam Baroque Choir. Ton Koopman.
\textsuperscript{47} Pahlen, The World of the Oratorio, 146.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{50} David, Mendel and Wolff, The New Bach Reader, 146.
\textsuperscript{51} Parker, Oxford History of Opera, 61.
\textsuperscript{52} Parrott, Essential Bach Choir, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{53} Marshall, “Bach’s Chorus,” 19.
that according to Bach’s own words, “it would be better if there were four singers to each part.”

Though it would be still better if the group were such that one could have 4 subjects on each voice and thus could provide each choir with 16 persons.

Marshall then goes on to say that the reason Bach originally wrote the Entwurff was that he did not have enough numbers in the choir and it was “an appeal to the Leipzig town council for financial assistance to help him restore the performing forces to their accustomed strength.” Can we assume then that Bach was writing for the number of singers he wanted, rather than the number of singers he actually had? Melamed reiterates this thought saying “…this kind of information does not tell us what Bach actually did – Just what he might have done if he chose to.”

The Matthäus-Passion was first performed on Good Friday 1729 (15 March) at the Thomaskirche, the year before he wrote the Entwurff. One would assume that the lack of numbers in his choir and orchestra was an on-going problem. Of predecessors in the post, Schelle (1677-1701) and Kuhnau (1701-1722), Bach writes that they

...already had to rely on the help of the studiosi when they wished to produce a complete and well-sounding music...

Bach was now unable to afford to use the university students he required, so relied largely on the vocal resources of the school. It would be uncharacteristic of a consummate professional like Bach to write a piece that needed more musicians than he had at his disposal, so perhaps he did indeed conceive it for one singer per part. In Bach’s writings we see that the choir at the Thomaskirche on March 18, 1729 had three Sopranos, three Altos, three Tenors, and three Basses; this was surely the cohort he used for the first performance of the Matthäus-Passion, a quartet for Coro 1, a quartet for Coro 2 and remaining singers as needed for the ripieno, chorales and extra recitative solos. Ton

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55 Wiewohn es nochbeßer, wenn der Coetus so beshaffen wäre, daß mann zu ieder Stimme 4 subjecta nehmen, und also ieden Chor mit 16. Persohnen bestellenkönte.
57 Melamed, Hearing Bach’s Passions, 22.
58 Pahlen, The World of the Oratorio, 28.
59 The studiosi were university students employed to ‘bump’ the choir and orchestra as and when needed.
60 ...sich schon der Beyhülffe derer Herrn Studiosorum bedienen müßen, wenn sie eine vollständige und wohhlautende Music haben produieren wollen.
61 Neumann and Schultz, Bach-Dokumente, 62; David, Mendel and Wolff, The New Bach Reader, 149.
Koopman reflects on a letter written to him by the scholar Christoph Wolff in March 1997 in which he points out that “Bach’s private students and family members (W.F. Bach, C.P.E Bach, etc.) would join the ensemble….the ensemble was always larger than the numbers of names available to us.” Parrott, however, states that Bach’s sons were not full members of the Thomasschule and suggests that “…any musical contribution they may have made is just as likely to have been instrumental as vocal.” Since Bach also had problems with obtaining enough instrumentalists, so singers had to be drawn into the ranks of the orchestra despite the groups of instrumentalists hired by the Town Council that Bach in his Entwurff describes in a less than flattering manner:

*Modesty forbids me to speak at all truthfully of their qualities and musical knowledge.*

Melamed, Rifkin and Parrott suggest that perhaps it is wrong to focus so much on the numbers mentioned in the Entwurff, and look instead to the physical parts as a guide to how many performers were used in this work. While some scholars such as Marshall and Koopman assert that performers would share copies, others do not. There are plenty of images from Bach’s time and beyond that show choristers sharing music and one could argue that this is as good a reason as any to accept this argument. The 1769 illustration [Figure 1.2] from *Musikalische Neu-Jahrs-Geschenke* that Ton Koopman uses shows singers sharing music. By way of contrast, a nineteenth-century etching by Dawant [Figure 1.3] that hangs in my music room shows the majority of them looking at their own copies: perhaps some of them forgot their music!

These pictures cannot be relied upon entirely, since both probably include a good measure of artistic licence. Melamed says while many people suggest that the concertist would hold the copy and a ripienist would look on from either side, allowing three to share one copy, he says “there is no evidence that it was.” The vocal parts that survive for the Matthäus-Passion show this would not work [Table 1.1]. Separate copies for the parts of Ancilla 1 and 2, and Uxor Pilati (soprano), Judas and Pontif 1 (Bass), and Petrus, Caiaphas, Pontif 2, and Pilatus (Bass) are in existence and these parts do not feature in the concertist’s copy. How then could these ripieno singers be looking at the concertist’s copy? It is implausible.

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64 *Von deren qualitaten und musicalischen Wißenschafften aber etwas nach der Warheit zu erwheinenm, verbietet mir die Bescheidenheit*.
Figure 1.2 A mixed ensemble, illustrated in *Musikalische Neujahrs-Geschenke* (Zurich, 1769)

Figure 1.2 removed for copyright reasons. It can be found on page 117 of Koopman and Carolan’s “Bach’s Choir, an Ongoing Story,” *Early Music* 26, no.1 (February 1998).

Figure 1.3 Albert Pierre Dawant, *The Choristers*, nineteenth-century, engraving, 15x17in.
The “…ripieno parts themselves make it clear what was for the concertist and what was for the whole ensemble…a ripienist would simply have sung the music in his part and not sing anything else.”

The evidence suggests that the parts were designed to be used by one singer; in other words, eight concertists were split between Coro 1 and Coro 2, with the separate ripieno parts being taken by other singers. It is with this information that today’s soloist should be prepared to sing the whole work, whether as the concertist in Coro 1 or Coro 2, and not just stand and sing the arias and recitatives. In the performance of the excerpt from the Matthäus-Passion, I sang the role of the concertist, singing the choral numbers as well as the soprano solo surrounded by seven other concertists. This was to highlight the range of techniques required by the singer: blended chorale singing, energetic florid chorus singing, and the spun melismas as a chamber musician in the aria, all within the confines of a one-per-part performance. A small ensemble, particularly an ensemble of soloists, makes articulation and dynamic variation much easier. The text is clearer and the singers are part of the instrumental ensemble, rather than singing over the top of it, allowing “…a much more evenly shared responsibility of the delivery of notes and text [...]” between the singers and instrumentalists. Nevertheless, for the trained soloist this would be far more technically challenging. In my own case, I would need to draw on my solo and choral skills; I would need to be so much more aware of every nuance and the tone I made for fear of dominating the sound. Perhaps this is a challenge singers should undertake at least once in their performing career: it would certainly give the soloist more respect for the choristers who normally sing behind them. The German tenor Fritz Wunderlich even said that “…Bach requires an almost instrumental approach to singing, in which you not only have to concentrate on expression and vocal quality but on the interpretation of the composition as such.” But many would say that it is too technically demanding for the solo singer to be both the soloist and the chorister. Dr Paul Steinitz, founder of the London Bach Society claims, “…this is not a practice to be recommended, not only because the strain on the voices is too great, but also because the dramatic effect suffers…” Paul McCreesh, however, argues that the “…stamina issue is a red herring really….it’s no more demanding than a major opera role.”

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66 Melamed, Hearing Bach’s Passions, 25.
67 Ibid., 5.
68 Schwaiger, "If you sing naturally."
69 Steinitz, Performing Bach’s Vocal Music. 5-6.
Table 1.1 Parts used in Bach’s St Matthew Passion performances\textsuperscript{71}

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<td>Soprano in Ripieno</td>
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<td>Ancil.1</td>
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<td>Ancil.2</td>
<td>Pontif. 1</td>
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<td>Pontif. [Caiaphas]</td>
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<td>Uxor Pilati</td>
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<td>Pontif. 2</td>
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\textsuperscript{71} This is a version of tables found in Parrott, The Essential Bach Choir, 83 and Rifkin, “Bach’s Chorus: A Preliminary Report,” 749.

\textsuperscript{72} Copies of earlier performances do not survive, but Rifkin maintains that there would have been copies of earlier scores.

Rifkin, “Bach’s Chorus,” 748.
Were the performers of the *Matthäus-Passion* regarded as soloists or choristers? Today a singer may feel that it is ‘beneath’ them to be a member of the choir, whereas it was assumed that as a member of Bach’s elite choir at the Thomaskirche the singer would excel in both roles. The academic and musician John Butt, an who himself has recently released a CD of the *St Matthew Passion* (Final Performing Version, c.1742) and Handel’s *Messiah* with one-per-part vocal ensemble, describes much of the chorus music as soloistic in its writing “…that these choral lines were essentially soloistically conceived, however many singers might actually have realized them…” demanding a high level of technical ability. Even with a small ensemble, Paul McCreesh found

…with two tiny choirs of nine singers, I often felt the choruses could lack flexibility, and moreover found it difficult to achieve a good balance between voices and instruments. And if I thought nine brilliant, hand-picked English chorus singers were too loud, then maybe there was a problem with the concept. Once I’d made the break I suddenly felt the most exhilarating sense of freedom. I simply felt that the choruses when sung by solo voices became infinitely more characterful.

However, Butt asks musicians to remember that “Bach’s Passions—however operatic in style and affect—were never conceived along operatic lines…they were vehicles of preaching rather than entertainment.”

Understanding the debate surrounding the reading of the *Entwurff* will help the solo singer understand the environment in which Bach was working and give an idea as to how he conceived his music. We cannot replicate Bach’s sound palette, however, nor perhaps truly understand it. There are now reproductions of baroque instruments but no reproductions of baroque voices. Steinitz believes that for Bach to be truly authentically performed today:

...then it is essential that soloists – preferably all male – are chosen having straight clean tone to match, and that the choir – also preferably all male – is small; the maximum number being about 30. Their tone should also be free from vibrato. This is too often forgotten in ‘authentic’ performances.

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73 John Butt is Gardiner Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow, musical director of Edinburgh’s Dunedin Consort and was organ scholar at King’s College Cambridge. University of Glasgow.
74 Butt, “Bach’s Vocal Scoring: What Can It Mean?”
75 Pettitt, “Interview with Paul McCreesh.” 15.
76 Butt, “Bach’s Vocal Scoring: What Can It Mean?”
Surely Steinitz has a point: of course Bach only used boys and men, so an “authentic” performance should only involve males. There is one major problem with this, it is impossible to replicate a treble voice of the eighteenth century. Boys’ voices broke much later than they do today, as late as seventeen or eighteen-years-old, and even Bach himself mentions a singer by the name of Gottfried Theodor Krause who was General Prefect at the Thomasschule at the age of 22. It could be debated that a ‘boy’ of this age would be singing in falsetto, however Bacilly states that in France boys voices broke at the age of 15-20, and “one writer advises parents to send their sons to Germany to retard the age of puberty by the rigours of the climate.” When Paul McCreesh was asked why he did not use boys in his recording of the Mattheus-Passion, he replied that if boys today had the same technical ability of an adult baroque singer then it would be an option. However, he feels that the boys of today do not have the emotional range needed due to their age and he does not “…want to use boys because they can sing nicely, sound cute and look sweet.”

Should we be attempting to perform Bach in an historically informed approach? We cannot replicate a true performance. We do not have the same singers, voices, instrumentalists, instruments or ears. But the soloist of today should be able to sing as both soloist and chorister without feeling as if their soloist skills are being brought into question. This of course is easier said than done, and many singers prefer not to be seen in the ensemble for fear of ‘losing face’ as a soloist. However there is much modern oratorio writing where the lines again are blurred.

**Berliner Messe**

If the eighteenth and nineteenth-century oratorio tradition reveals the anxiety between the solo and the choral sound, the professional and the amateur, it is in the music of Estonian Arvo Pärt that these lines are again able to be blurred. Paul Hillier writes that the minimalism style of Pärt “…was a much needed counterbalance to the preceding decades of

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78 German courts were known to have females singing in choirs and as soloists, though in the city choirs, only men and boys were used. Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice*, 76.

79 Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice*, 76.

80 Johann Friedrich Köhler mentions an incident where Gottfried Krause whom at the age of 22 was expelled from the school, Bach describes the incident in his letter to the Leipzig Council on August 12, 1736. David, Mendel and Wolff, *The New Bach Reader*, 172-173


84 Many musicianship skills are learnt in the ensemble and choral singing, but singers often forgo this to be regarded exclusively as a soloist. See Chapter 4, page 64 as an example.
intense expressionism that had characterized high modernism." Pärt’s 1990 Berliner Messe was written for four soloists and organ, and later reworked for choir and orchestra. Pärt writes in his tintinnabuli form of composition. This is a two-part homophonic texture where “a melodic voice moves mostly by step around a central pitch (often but not always the tonic), and the tintinnabuli voice sounds the notes of the tonic triad.” In the Berliner Messe, the soprano and tenor voices outline the tonic triad of G minor and all four soloists sing as one voice, often overlapping. The harmonic structure of each syllable of the mass is more important than the individual voice. The close harmonies and relentless rhythm means that any soloist tackling this work needs to be skilled in the demands of choral singing. Pärt calls for the singers to use as little vibrato as possible “…to allow for maximum impact of the intonation…” The conductor Andreas Peer Kähler writes that in performing the music of Pärt “…few musicians have adequate perception or can control the movement and intensity of their vibrato, even if the majority are convinced they actually do.” In my own experience of singing the Berliner Messe, we had four singers with a range of choral and solo experience. We had different rates of vibrato and different weights of voices. We were conscious of making a sound that had as little vibrato as possible while still keeping a vibrant sound to ensure that we were in tune. Out of the four singers, I had the largest voice with the most projection, so it was technically challenging to maintain a vibrato-free sound. I spent most of my time singing on thin-fold, and thinking about tuning rather than expression. The expression for this piece comes from the use of harmony and the text. Fortunately, the alto and soprano lines interweave, so much of the time I was beneath the alto line, allowing ease of balance.

A Child of Our Time

My oratorio recital ended with an excerpt from one of the most important oratorios of the twentieth century, Sir Michael Tippett’s A Child of Our Time, written as a response to the Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938. A Child of Our Time “would be a kind of modern passion, in which the scapegoat does not die voluntarily but instead acts violently [against

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85 Hillier, Arvo Pärt, 14.
86 Hillier, "Pärt, Arvo."
87 Hillier, Arvo Pärt, 205.
88 Kähler, “Radiating from silence,” 195
89 Please refer to Chapter 3 for further discussion on vibrato.
90 Please see glossary.
91 Kristallnacht refers to the attack on Jewish homes, shops, buildings and synagogues across Nazi-controlled Germany and Austria, after a young Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan killed the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath. The term Kristallnacht or Crystal Night, alludes to the amount of glass that was broken and left on the ground like shards of crystal. The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaiica, sv “Grynszpan, Herschel (1921-?)”
the faceless adversary.”92 “How can I cherish my man?” is an aria of supreme anguish, much like the cry of Mary in the Stabat Mater. The aria finishes with “…one of the most supreme moments in Tippett’s music, a transitional vocalise poignant as to set off that instant shock of recognition which floods the eyes with emotion.”93 This cry extends into the chorale Steal Away where the soprano soloist is required to float effortlessly across the top of the choir as if she is the voice of the angels. Despite Tippett’s A Child of our Time being written for the concert hall, “…[he ingeniously recast] the baroque passion, substituting negro spirituals for Lutheran chorales.”94 Tippett also employed Bach’s concertist and ripienist roles in the use of the term “leader.” He based his spiritual models on the recordings of the Hall Johnson Choir:

They introduced him to the practice of using soloists as ‘leaders’ in the choral sections… [t]his means that when the tenor solo…is the ‘leader’ and singing with the tenors of the chorus, he is not merely being provided with a chance to warm up in preparation for his genuine solos in the central sections; he is given the responsibility of articulating the tune and carrying the chorus with him.95

It was in a performance of the work in Georgia attended by Tippett,96 where the audience joined in the spirituals, making it reminiscent of Bach’s performances of the Passions where the chorales were the congregational hymns. The chorales were published separately, somewhat reluctantly by Tippett in 1958; however, he later wrote “they became, as it were, the huge voice of a crowd of folk singing together.”97 It was important for me to include A Child of Our Time in my recital, so I could begin and end with a chorale, highlighting the roles of the concertist and ripienist.

It is impossible to remove 300 years of music and the developments of vocal training from a singer’s, or indeed an instrumentalist’s performance practice. I am not suggesting that we should go back to the 1970s ideal of a “baroque soprano,” an airy, vibrato-less sound, nor am I suggesting that Bach or Handel should be sung in a “Wagnerian” style. Voices today naturally have different colours and different vibrato rates, and I am confident that this would be the same in Bach’s time. Of course some voices suit one type of music over another, but today’s versatile singer needs to be able to sing in a variety of styles, from

92 Kemp, Tippett; The Composer, 152.
93 Ibid., 172.
95 Kemp, Tippett; The Composer, 172
96 Williams, Summertown Choral Society.
97 Ibid.
baroque to modern, and make the necessary technical adjustments. Musical singers should hardly sing Bach in the same way that they sing Mendelssohn, or indeed Tippett. Today’s singer needs to be versed in the art of solo and choral singing, as one never knows what job is around the corner and with whom you will be performing. Fritz Wunderlich makes the excellent point that “If you know how every kind of music is to be sung, you can sing an operetta and follow it up with a Bach aria without any trouble.”

For the soloist in New Zealand in the twenty-first century, the way to perform oratorio comes down largely to a matter of taste. What a singer would do for one conductor is different for another. How he or she would sing with a period orchestra will be different to how he or she sings with a modern orchestra, due to the different colours and natural volume of the instruments. However, it is important for soloists today to understand that for much of the repertoire their vocal lines were composed originally as part of the choral texture, and are integral to that sound. It is not enough for soloists to turn up at the first rehearsal only knowing the ‘solo’ parts. They need to understand how this fits in with the rest of the work even if they are not singing the choral parts. Perhaps is it “…now time to abandon traditional choral protectionism and, instead, to explore the new possibilities that smaller vocal ensembles throw open.” Soloists need to respect the far larger part that choirs play in oratorio, and start passing their bouquet of flowers to the choir.

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98 Schwaiger, "If you sing naturally."
99 Parrott, Bach’s Chorus, 577.
Technical Challenges facing the Operatic and Choral Soprano

Voice teachers today are conscious of giving appropriate repertoire to their developing singers. For choral singers however, the technical demands placed on them often far exceed the technical skill set of many soloists in their early training.\(^1\) If you look at a standard choral programme, the vocal techniques required by the singers are vast, with music ranging from a piece by Thomas Tallis, to a movement from an oratorio such as Handel’s *Messiah*, or a newly commissioned work. Untrained singers in community choirs and youth choirs are expected to perform these works, often without any vocal tuition, whereas a singer presenting an operatic recital, would typically be able to draw on years of technical and stylistic training. At a recital by Bryn Terfel in Auckland in 2009,\(^2\) he spoke to the audience about how all he wanted to do while studying at music college (GSMD) was sing arias, but all his singing teacher would let him do was sing English Song so that he could work on his technique before moving into the demanding repertoire of opera and oratorio.

This chapter explores the similarity of techniques required by a solo soprano and a choral soprano and features as a reference point my second recital, “The Operatic Heroine”. This recital demonstrated the demands that are often placed on a choral soprano, but through the perspective of soloist’s repertoire. Many of these examples explore the challenges faced in singing over the *secondo passaggio*,\(^3\) the transition point between the middle and upper register where music of the literature lies. From Purcell to Tippett, significant technical styles and changes are needed across four languages and cover a wide range of emotions and narratives. This may seem at times incongruous to the audience – at best, it might come across as an operatic gala, at worst, a concert lacking thematic purpose – but those same individuals would consider it perfectly normal for a choir to perform such a diverse programme of works.\(^4\)

The soprano Lilli Lehmann was famed for her technique and sang music from Mozart to Wagner, changing her vocal quality as demanded by each genre.\(^5\) While as singing teachers

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1. A first year singer at the tertiary institute I teach at would mainly be singing English and Italian song for their studies, however could have been involved in a project to sing in the choir of Bach’s B minor Mass.
2. *Bryn Terfel in Recital*, Auckland Town Hall, 20 June 2009
3. See glossary.
4. Concerts by the NZ Youth Choir and the Graduate Choir are always rich and varied in styles and repertoire. In reviews by William Dart in the New Zealand Herald, he mentions this wide range by saying “Few professional ensembles could rival the a cappella precision of Rossini’s *O Salutaris Hostia* or Healey Willan’s *Rise up, my Love, my Fair One.*” Dart, “Tower New Zealand Youth Choir at Holy Trinity Cathedral.” And “…that the evening’s music would not be found ‘all on one CD’. Dart, “The Graduate Choir at Auckland Grammar Great Hall.”
like Isabel Cunningham rightly says that there is “One voice, one technique, and there is only one way to use the voice effectively and without strain,” meaning that one technique, if used correctly, can serve a number vocal styles. However, it would be unusual for a singer to move between a wide variety of Fächer and styles over the course of one concert. Indeed not many sopranos are regularly expected to do this due to the different demands of each genre (and have a voice at the end of it!), yet time and again choristers are asked to do precisely this in concerts that range from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century. The disparity between the physical and vocal endurance demands placed on the soloist and choristers significantly impacts singers. In opera and oratorio the soloist would not be singing for the entire time, relying on the system in place that “soloists rest their voices during the choral numbers and other soloists’ arias.” Conversely, the chorister is granted three or four minutes rest (sometimes still standing) during the arias. In the case of the Mozart Requiem it is only in the “Tuba mirum,” the “Recordare” and the “Benedictus” that the choir does not sing; a mere twelve minutes within a fifty minute work. The techniques required by the solo soprano in an operatic recital are as varied and demanding as those for a choral soprano. From thin-fold to singing on the full mass of the vocal-fold, long spun legato lines, florid coloratura, agility over wide leaps, stylistic differences between idioms, blend, different languages, the demands placed on the singer will be discussed.

The music of Mozart is often one of the earliest sources of songs and arias for the developing singer. It is beautiful to sing, but does not come without its own technical challenges. In his book Prima Donna: A History, Rupert Christiansen describes the music of Mozart as “…uniquely gratifying and cruelly testing to sing.” Many roles require “…a heroic dramatic compass that can effortlessly scale down to a liquid legato.” The role of Fiordiligi from his opera buffa Così fan tutte is one such role. Her aria “Come scoglio” demands a high level of technical ability from the singer - dramatic singing, coloratura lines and lyricism. It was written for Mme. Ferraresi del Bene, a singer that Mozart reportedly did not like. Mozart exploited the extreme range of Ferraresi del Bene’s voice by “…writing single notes separated by such wide intervals [2.1] that the singer was constantly having to alternate between the soprano and alto colouring of her voice with

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6 Isabel Cunningham, e-mail message to the author, November 14, 2012.
7 Chipman, Singing with the Mind, 135.
8 Choral blend can usually be described as the unification of voices so individual voices do not dominate the sound. It also relates to the conductor’s sound aesthetic, and can also be affected by the placement of singers. See chapter 3, page 53-56.
9 Christiansen, Prima Donna, 40.
10 Ibid.
11 See glossary.
12 Hughes, Famous Mozart Operas, 161.
hilarious results.”\textsuperscript{13} It is not unlike the soprano line in Mozart’s \textit{Requiem}. Passages from the “Kyrie” [2.2] and “Come scoglio” [2.3] are very much alike. Both passages require agility in the \textit{coloratura} and flexibility between the registers in the octave leaps.


\begin{music}
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\end{music}

\textbf{EXAMPLE 2.2} Mozart, \textit{Requiem}, “Kyrie,” bars 27-33

\begin{music}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2_2.png}
\end{music}

\textbf{EXAMPLE 2.3} Mozart, \textit{Così fan tutte}, act 1, no. 14, “Come scoglio,” bars 63-72

\begin{music}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2_3.png}
\end{music}

The following examples from the same works [2.4 and 2.5] demand dramatic legato singing, the ability to sing over the \textit{passaggio}\textsuperscript{14} with ease, and negotiate large intervallic leaps. In both pieces the soprano is expected to sit above the stave without straining the

\textsuperscript{13} Hughes, \textit{Famous Mozart Operas}, 161.

\textsuperscript{14} See glossary.
voice and maintain the beauty of line. This requires a sustained support, released larynx and re-articulation of the vowel to keep the line.

**EXAMPLE 2.4** Mozart, *Requiem*, “Dies irae,” bars 1-19

\[
\text{Allegro assai}
\]

\[
\text{Dies i-rae, di-es il-la, sol-vet sae-clum in fa-vil-la: te-st}
\]

\[
\text{Da-vid cum Si-byl-la. Quan-tus tre-mor est fu-tu-rus, quan-do}
\]

\[
\text{ju-dex est ven-tu-rus, cun-c	extsc{c}a stri-c	extsc{c}e dis-cus-su-rus!}
\]

This moment in “Come scoglio” [2.5] could be described as the lyrical part of the aria, where it is more about the sob\(^{15}\) in the sound, rather than the dramatic energy found elsewhere. Likewise in the *Requiem* [2.6] the “Confutatis,” requires the tone to be spun on an even breath, without the line being disturbed.

**EXAMPLE 2.5** Mozart, *Così fan tutte*, act 1, no.14, “Come scoglio,” bars 93-103

\[
\text{co-si-gnor que-stu-lum ma è for-te nel-la}
\]

\[
\text{fe-de e nel-la'amor, nel-la fe-de e nel-l'a mor.}
\]

\(^{15}\) See glossary.
The ensemble vocal writing of Mozart, for soloists and choristers, requires blend, acknowledgment of where the important line is, excellent tuning and teamwork. Christiansen has remarked that the ensemble and recitative writing while being “…unrewarding in terms of applause, require as much effort and artistry as the aria.” 16 “Ah guarda sorella” (from Così fan tutte) demands that the two sopranos, (or, depending on the production, the soprano and the mezzo), sing first as soloists and then together. The solo writing requires lyricism, flexibility and control, while the duet writing involves much singing in thirds [2.7]. In the Requiem, the sopranos and altos are required to do the same in the “Hostias” [2.8]. The convention of singing in thirds symbolizes the agreement between the characters’ thoughts and ideas, 17 and with this the vocal quality and vowel placement needs to be the same to highlight this concordance. The trio “Soave sia il vento” [2.9] asks for the same sustained singing as the “Hostias”, with a spinning tone and blended

16 Christiansen, Prima Donna, 40.
17 Cooke, The Language of Music, 51-64.
placement of vowels between the parts. For example, in *Cosi fan tutte*, Fiordiligi, Dorabella and Don Alfonso must sing the same open o [ɔ] on the word *nostri* for the singers to be in tune; something that would be expected by a choral director in the word *hostias* to achieve a choral blend.

**EXAMPLE 2.8** Mozart, *Requiem*, “Hostias,” bars 3-11

**EXAMPLE 2.9** Mozart, *Cosi fan tutte*, act 1, “Soave sia’il vento,” bars 31-37

“No word from Tom,” from Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, asks the soprano to sing in a “mixture of everything – wide range, legato singing, declamatory singing, diction and
character.”\textsuperscript{18} Although it is never stated in assessments of choral music, such expectations are regularly required of the choral singer. Benjamin Britten’s cantata \textit{Rejoice in the Lamb} demands many of the same techniques required by the Stravinsky. Musically, both pieces are difficult, with unconventional harmonic and rhythmic structures bringing difficult phrases like this florid passage in movement one, [2.10], and both require the singer to be articulate with excellent diction (and arguably, better diction than the soloist because the text must be heard in chorus). Furthermore, the choral soprano in \textit{Rejoice in the Lamb} has a more difficult job here than the soloist in “No word from Tom,” with phrases like “For the flute rhymes are suit mute and the like”[2.11], and “Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter, bind a leopard to the altar and consecrate his spear to the Lord” needing to be understood. Stravinsky’s use of repeating text as the technical demands increase helps the singer to be understood as the audience will hear it numerous times [2.12]. Nevertheless, while the soloist in the Stravinsky would always be a highly-trained soloist, it is commonplace for a relatively untrained choral soprano group to perform the Britten.

\textbf{EXAMPLE 2.10} Britten, \textit{Rejoice in the Lamb}, movement 1, “Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues,” bars 47-49

\begin{center}
\textbf{EXAMPLE 2.10}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{music}
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\staves\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill
\end{musicstaff}
\end{music}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textbf{EXAMPLE 2.11} Britten, \textit{Rejoice in the Lamb}, movement 7, “For the instruments are by their rhymes,” bars 45-50
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{music}
\begin{musicstaff}[middle:yes]
\staves\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill\hrulefill
\end{musicstaff}
\end{music}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{18} Legge, \textit{The Art of Auditioning}, 92-93.
Depuis le jour is one of Charpentier’s best known soprano arias, due to its beauty of line and emotion. The soprano needs “skill in floating the voice, using a delicious silver-like beauty of tone.” Yet such compositional techniques are also found in French choral music of the period. For example, in Fauré’s Requiem: the soprano line “Hosanna in excelsis” from the “Sanctus,” [2.13], and the opening of the “In Paradisum” [2.15] are both technically challenging for the singer. They require ease of singing over the upper passagio and a sustained subglottic pressure to ensure a spinning line.

EXAMPLE 2.13 Fauré, Requiem, “Sanctus,” bars 35-42

EXAMPLE 2.14 Fauré, Requiem, “In Paradisum,” bars 3-16

19 Legge, The Art of Auditioning, 64.
20 See glossary.
This is no different from the techniques required in *Depuis le jour* [2.15], and I would argue that the Fauré is more difficult with its additional challenge of choral blend. If the entire section is not singing the same vowel and it is not placed in the same way, harmonics will not match and the phrase will sound out of tune.

**EXAMPLE 2.15** Charpentier, *Louise*, act 3, “Depuis le jour,” bars 64-81

The operatic writing of Puccini demands strength of tone, beauty of line and vulnerability and his arias would not normally be given to a singer in the early stages of their development. “Si, mi chiamano Mimi” and “O soave fanciulla” from *La Bohème* require the singer to display warmth of tone in the middle of the voice and decisions must be made as to whether low notes are sung in head voice or in a chest mix. The difficulty for the soprano appears as the line goes above the *passagio* at “di primavere”[2.16]: if the soprano is not careful, these high notes could take her by surprise and her laryngeal position could be too high, resulting in a tense sound. The reverse happens in the “O soave fanciulla” where the soprano is asked to sing above the *passagio* and then drop an octave for the next line [2.17]. Again, it is easy to find a similar example from choral music. In “Zuversicht,” the third movement of Schumann’s *Vier doppelchörige Gesänge*, Op.141, the soprano line requires the choristers to sing *piano* through to *forte* in the space of a bar while there is still the expectation of a spun legato line [2.18], which is technically very similar to the following line of Mimi’s [2.16].

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21 Vowels can be placed, forward, back, high or low depending on the colour required.
22 Richard Miller’s list of repertoire suitable for the young or beginning singer does not include any arias by Puccini. Miller, *Solutions for Singers*, 261-271.
EXAMPLE 2.16 Puccini, La Bohème, act 1, “Si mi chiamano Mimi,” p.71-72

This stylistic approach is a standard feature of twentieth-century music as well. Take him, earth, for cherishing (1964) [2.19] by the English composer Herbert Howells, was written nearly a century later than the 1896 La Bohème and requires the same dynamic control and lyricism needed by someone singing Mimi.
“When I am laid in earth,” from *Dido and Aeneas*, [2.20] is one of the most famous soprano (or indeed mezzo arias) written by Purcell. The singer, over a ground bass, must control the line effortlessly. The opening phrase of the aria bears a striking technical resemblance to the opening line for the sopranos in Purcell’s beautiful choral work, *Lord, how long wilt thou be angry?* [2.21]. The exposed, sustained singing imparting great emotion is further heightened by the intervals of fourths or fifths that must not interrupt the vocal line.

EXAMPLE 2.20 Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, “When I am laid in earth, bars 6-14
The work of Purcell is often mistakenly considered to be “easy enough” for the young or amateur singer. When the notes are seemingly easy to learn, the difficulty in sustaining the line is often overlooked. The vocal writing of Handel provides more obvious difficulties for the singer and careful consideration must be given to aria choice for the developing singer. However, his choral writing is often more difficult technically than his arias. One would expect that the technique required for the florid style of Handel’s operatic arias should be far from the world of the choral singer, but this is not so. The wide intervals seen in this passage from the “Hallelujah Chorus” are found in any book of vocal technical exercises but in a performed vocal line can be taxing on the voice if the singer is unable to mix registers with ease.

23 The aria “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly” from Purcell’s The Indian Queen, Z.630, is a difficult song, with both taxing coloratura and passagio writing. Despite this, it remains a Grade Five song in the ABRSM Singing Syllabus. ABRSM Singing Syllabus 2012, “Grade Five”, 86.

24 See glossary.
In next two examples from *Messiah*, the difficult runs found in “The Lord gave the word” [2.23] and the exposed opening phrase in “And he shall purify” [2.24], can show up any technical flaws in the soprano section. The difficult runs and repetition of top Gs would be demanding for a soloist, let alone an untrained community choir soprano section.

**EXAMPLE 2.23** Handel, *Messiah*, “The Lord Gave the Word,” bars 9-23

The runs here are often sung in a laboured, unarticulated way by choral societies around the world. As a teacher I would not give a first, or perhaps even a second year singer a song that contained *coloratura* like this, and at the tertiary institution where I teach, first year singers are not allowed to present “vocally inappropriate or potentially damaging

**EXAMPLE 2.24** Handel, *Messiah*, “And he shall purify,” bars 1-6
However, it is deemed acceptable for a choir to sing this with little technical experience. I find the coloratura in “Non disperar,” Giulio Cesare, [2.25] is nowhere near as technically demanding as in the Messiah examples. Handel allows the solo soprano a few bars rest at opportune moments and there are only three bars where the line is continually above the passagio, the choral soprano is not so lucky in the Messiah, where much of the writing sits on or above the passagio.

Rodolfo Celletti writes that “[i]n Romantic opera in Italy, melismatic singing is the formula used for the idealization of woman. […] she will burst forth into arias of excited indignation, vigorous and declamatory in manner, but always alternating with tender, smooth, nostalgic tunes in florid style.” Maria Stuarda’s aria Guarda, su’ prati appare certainly is an example of this. The Bel Canto style of writing is also found in the choral world, as in Rossini’s Petite Messe Solennelle. In a similar Bel Canto style, the Six ‘Fire Songs’ on Italian Renaissance Poems written by the American Morten Lauridsen certainly require virtuosic singing contrasted with spinning legato lines.

26 Celletti, A History of Bel Canto, 196.
27 Bel canto literally means ‘beautiful singing’ and is characterised by flowing lines contrasted with moments of virtuosic singing. Sadie, Grove Concise Dictionary, 70.
28 See Chapter 1, page 12 for more information on the Petite Messe Solennelle.
EXAMPLE 2.27 Donizetti, *Maria Stuarda*, Act 1 Scene 2, bars 64-69

In both examples [2.26] and [2.27], the soprano is required to sing arpeggiated lines around the passagio while keeping the legato line secure, so the high notes do not stick out from the line. This is managed by using a decrescendo on the approach to the top note of the phrase. Higher notes will naturally sound louder, so they must be sung quieter to remain the same volume.

EXAMPLE 2.28 Lauridsen, *Six ‘Fire Songs’ on Italian Renaissance Poems*, song 5, bars 2-8

EXAMPLE 2.29 Donizetti, *Maria Stuarda*, Act 1 Scene 2, bars 83-95

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Both of these phrases [2.28] and [2.29] encompass a 9\(^{th}\) with moments of chromaticism and closed Italian vowels required on upper passagio notes. In the Lauridsen a closed e [e] is required on the word *serene*, and in the Donizetti on the word *reca*.

**EXAMPLE 2.30** Lauridsen, *Six ‘Fire Songs’ on Italian Renaissance Poems*, song 6, bars 15-20

**EXAMPLE 2.31** Lauridsen, *Six ‘Fire Songs’ on Italian Renaissance Poems*, song 1, bars 14-21

**EXAMPLE 2.32** Donizetti, *Maria Stuarda*, Act 1 Scene 2, bars 240-248
Examples [2.30], [2.31], and [2.32] require the soprano to sing in long phrases, sing above the passagio in a rhythmic, forte manner and sing over a wide range, while still maintaining a spun tone and incorporated technique, required in the bel canto repertoire.

In another technical example, Mozart employs g minor in Pamina’s aria “Ach, ich fühle’s” from Die Zauberflöte [2.33]. This difficult aria “…is almost an unbearable outpouring of grief,”30 highlighted by descending lines and melismatic cries on “Herzen”. While melismas of this difficulty are hard to find in Mozart’s choral writing, his use of g minor and descending lines are commonplace. In his Mass in c minor, the “Qui Tollis” movement demands that the sopranos sing long sustained descending chromatic lines with ease [2.34].

EXAMPLE 2.33 Mozart, Die Zauberflöte, Act 2, “Ach ich fühle’s,” bars 8-16

EXAMPLE 2.34 Mozart, Mass in c minor, “Qui Tollis” bars 7-21

30 Hughes, Famous Mozart Operas, 225
The choral writing of Michael Tippett in his *A Child of our Time* [2.35] highlights many of the same musical and technical requirements demanded in Jenifer’s aria “Is it so strange?” from his *Midsummer Marriage* [2.36]. The difficult melismas and tessitura are almost identical, proving to be a challenge for the soloist and the chorister alike.

**EXAMPLE 2.35** Tippett, *A Child of our Time*, No. 28, bars 9-14

**EXAMPLE 2.36** Tippett, *Midsummer Marriage*, Act 1, “Is it so strange?” p.122-123 (Vocal score)

Both of these phrases require integration of the registers, excellent breath support and excellent musicality in order for the notes to be correct. These phrases cannot be sightread and require hours of practice for the vocal mechanism to be able to execute them correctly.

As experience teaches us, many choral performances are often marred by insufficient musical and technical rehearsal and technical limitations, so much so that musicians and audiences alike think that this is just how choirs and choral pieces sound. Perhaps the most famous impossible soprano choral line is found in Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. Betty Jean Chipman writes “In my opinion, high school or university choirs should never sing Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony…[the passages] are too intense, too long, too high, and too
The soprano line is particularly taxing on the voice and is a difficult piece for any singer, however accomplished. A voice teacher would never give a Wagnerian aria to anyone without the required technique and years of experience behind them, so why should choral singers with little or no technique be expected to ‘just sing’ the Beethoven?

The soprano line from “An die Freude” [2.37] is relentless and sits on or above the passagio most of the time. A phrase such as this can often result in vocal fatigue for the choral soprano, and in turn results in shrill or out of tune singing. The notoriously demanding Wagner would never ask his sopranos to sing like this without a break, and, for example, no line in the aria “Dich teure Halle” from Tannhäuser comes near it.

EXAMPLE 2.37 Beethoven, Symphony 9, Movement 4, “An die Freude,” bars 8-16

As discussed earlier, the musical examples I have presented mainly focus on technical problems relating to the passagio. As Katharin Rundus, Director of Vocal Studies at Fullerton College, Ca., USA explains “…our goal for traditional singing, both solo and choral, is to create a seamless range in all voices, seemingly without any register breaks or interruptions.” It is a major challenge for inexperienced singers, whether they are young or older, to sing continuously in the passagio, the area in the voice when the singer needs to “change gears” in order to sing higher or lower without losing vocal colour. As the soprano heads through the secondo passagio, the larynx must tilt in order to access the upper

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31 Chipman, Singing with the Body, 136.
32 Rundus, Cantabile, 95.
33 See glossary.
notes of the voice while maintaining a similar vocal colour. As the singer sings up the scale, the thyroid cartilage should tilt forward over the cricoid cartilage creating tension in the vocal folds, allowing them to vibrate with less breath pressure. [Fig. 2.1]

**Figure 2.1** The Larynx in Tilt Position

Figure 2.2 removed for copyright reasons. This picture can be found on page 49 of Colin Baldy’s book *The Student Voice*.

As Colin Baldy explains, “Correct tilting of the larynx aids the removal of a breathy tone.” It is so important for soloists and choristers alike to be able to sing with a clear tone above the *passaggio* so every note has a core and a full harmonic structure.

By looking at the choral examples in this chapter it would be easy to argue that singing teachers are right in not allowing their pupils to sing in a choir, but that fails to understand the nature of the repertoire singers will perform as soloists or as the member of an ensemble. However, these choral examples are the place where young singers can learn a variety of techniques in the comfort of singing with others. Yes, the choral examples are difficult, but the technical demands are reduced as there are 5, 10 or 20 singers singing the one line. There is safety in numbers. Certainly, many choral directors need to consider what repertoire they give their choirs, but singing teachers equally need to be sympathetic to choral music and be involved in the teaching of it at studio level.

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36 Ibid., 50-51.
37 Chapter 4, “There’s a soprano in the altos!” looks at the harmonic structure of the voice.
38 See examples 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 2.8, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13, 2.14, 2.18, 2.19, 2.21, 2.22, 2.23, 2.24, 2.26, 2.28, 2.30, 2.31, 2.34, 2.35, 2.37.
The scope of examples from this recital may seem vast, and perhaps not suitable for the one solo soprano, but this is normal for the choral soprano. The fach system that is in place in Europe is not totally effective for singers in a country with a limited population and singing work; if they want to work as singers, they have to be able to sing a range of roles in various fachs. In the way a chorister is expected to sing in a variety of styles and techniques, the same can be said for the operatically-trained soprano in New Zealand. Singers in small countries like New Zealand need to have a flexible technique so they are able to sing a wide range of music and be diverse in their music making, just like the choral soprano. The role of the choral soprano needs to be taken more seriously and good vocal technique needs to be fostered in choirs, so that there is parity rather than antagonism between the two disciplines.
Vibrato\(^1\) is one of the most contentious issues when it comes to trained solo voices singing in a choir. Carl Seashore describes it as “…pulsation of pitch usually accompanied with synchronous pulsations of loudness and timbre, of such extent and rate as to give a pleasing flexibility, tenderness and richness in the tone.”\(^2\) It is the variation in pitch and richer tone that causes many conductors to not want to use a soloistic voice in their choir and the habit of many conductors to ask singers to reduce or even remove the vibrato that makes many singing teachers not allow their students to sing in a choir. Richard Miller argues that when the vibrato is removed the “resultant timbre...is quite impure”\(^3\) due to the suppression of the first and third formants. However, much of the current research on vibrato focuses on the operatic singer rather than the choral singer.

Vibrato rate is measured by the number of undulations per second and how far the frequency rises and falls during a cycle. A “normal” vibrato rate is between six and seven undulations per second and no greater than a semitone in pitch variation; this is not aurally perceived. As the singer sings louder, the upper formants become more apparent. For the choral singer this can be problematic, especially when it goes against the conductor’s view of their choral aesthetic. When singing in a choral mode, experienced singers will adjust their volume to that of those around them, but the problem comes when the singer tries to sing louder in order to hear themselves, because at this point the vibrato rate increases and blend becomes an issue.\(^4\)

Modern researchers have been able to experiment and understand vibrato on a scientific level in a way that was not possible in the past. Measurements taken by the American singing teacher William Vennard\(^5\) and colleagues in 1970 found that when singing with vibrato, movement occurs in the *cricothyroid muscle* (they stretch the vocal folds), the *vocalis* (they tense the vocal cords), and the lateral *cricoarytenoid muscles* (they adduct the vocal cords).\(^6\) However, when Sundberg poses the question [w]hat mechanism generates the vibrato? he answers “…we lack definitive answers and clear facts.”\(^7\) He also notes that

\(^{1}\) See glossary.
\(^{3}\) Miller, *Solutions for Singers*, 239.
\(^{6}\) See glossary.
many other structures in the vocal tract vibrate including the pharynx walls and the tongue and even the jaw. Any first year vocal student can tell you that a quivering tongue and jaw is the sign of a poor technique, but as Sundberg reminds us, “...this effect can sometimes be observed in female singers who undisputedly belong to the international top rank.”

Composers as early as Pretorius (1571-1621) believed that the human voice must have vibrato. He wrote of one singer being “…endowed by God and Nature with an especially beautiful, vibrant, and floating or quivering voice;” however, the German theorist Christoph Bernard (1628-92) viewed vibrato as “a defect associated with the elderly.”

Mozart wrote of vibrato as being a natural function of the voice and in a letter to his father regarding the singing of the bass Joseph Meissner who sang with a large vibrato, he wrote:

_The human voice is naturally tremulous – but in its own way – and only to the extent that it is beautiful...but as soon as you overstep the limits, it’s no longer beautiful – because it’s contrary to nature. It then strikes me as being just like the organ when the bellows are blowing._

More modern treatises tend not to talk about vibrato other than it being a natural part of singing and “[u]nless forbidden to do so, children will sing vibrantly.” Lucie Manén, talked of _vibrazione_ as being necessary for a well-executed _messa di voce_. “Preliminary to the production of a true Messa di Voce are exercises for Vibrazione.” These exercises began with repeated notes followed by slurring the repeated notes. However, she rarely mentions vibrato in her _The Art of Singing_. Viktor Fuchs allows five sentences on the subject in his _The Art of Singing and Voice Technique_, and asserts that while instrumentalists have to practise vibrato, “…in singing there are no special exercises.” Charles Kennedy Scott observes that a “…steady tone must be the basis of a vibrato tone” and that the “…heart-strings, not the vocal cords, are what the singer should try to put into

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8 Ibid., 166.
9 Praetorius, _Syntagma musicum_ 163-70, quoted in Stark, _Bel Canto_, 129.
10 Bernhard, _Von der Singer_, 13-29, quoted in Stark, _Bel Canto_, 130.
11 Or Meisner. Kenyon, _Mozart in Salzburg_, 117
13 Miller, _Solutions for Singers_, 240.
14 I was taught by Beatrice Webster MBE, who was a pupil of Lucie Manén.
15 See glossary.
16 Manén, _The Art of Singing_, 32.
17 Fuchs, _The Art of Singing_, 131.
18 Scott, _Word and Tone Vol. 1_, 65.
vibration.”¹⁹ Although he does say in a now antiquated method, that “...as the voice rises, if it is to vibrate easily, [the voice] must be tipped further back into the throat.”²⁰ These teachers would have assumed that the sound contained vibrato. But does this research help the choral singer, or more importantly, a singer who wants a career as a soloist and a choral singer, especially those young singers who fear that too much vibrato will limit their choral opportunities or make them sound too old? Richard Miller states that “…vibrato involves a relaxant principle in laryngeal action,”²¹ and Barbara Smith and Robert Sataloff, while not specifically mentioning vibrato, states in Choral Pedagogy that “[r]elaxation is the first step toward good choral singing.”²²

Dr Darryl Edwards from the University of Toronto regards vibrato as a natural, healthy part of singing and the moment it is removed, the vocal health of the singer is compromised, questioning why young singers are asked by many conductors to remove or suppress their vibrato. In his paper in the Canadian Music Educator, he contends that professional singers have the technique to be able to choose when and how much vibrato they can use for stylistic reasons, but that young singers are not able to do this: “…they [conductors] do not realize that at this point in their development, consistent straight-tone singing is not only limiting their stamina, resonance, and interpretive possibilities, it is also cropping their chances of ever obtaining their ideal vocal freedom.”²³

Studies by Rossing, Sundberg and Ternström have found that in solo singing the fundamental is quieter and the formants are more apparent than in choral singing.²⁴ This appears to be something that occurs naturally and I can find no study to date that looks at whether singers are able to be taught how to do this technically. With the majority of solo music performed with accompaniment, many voice majors lack the skills to sing in an unaccompanied context so their technique is compromised resulting in frequency fluctuations in vibrato. Rossing argues that fluctuation is a compelling reason for vocal adjustment being highlighted in the research of Goodwin, Sacerdote and Lottermoser.

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¹⁹ Scott, Word and Tone Vol. 1, 129.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Miller, The Structure of Singing, 185.
²² Sataloff and Smith, Professional Voice, 760
Note that in the choral mode, the subject generally adjusted his singing level to the level of the other singers, whereas in the solo mode the level of the singing often differed considerably to the format of the piano accompaniment. This result illustrates a hardly unexpected difference between singing under choral and soloistic conditions.  

“Almost all professional opera singers develop vibrato without thinking about it and without actively trying to acquire it,” but many choristers are asked to sing without it as demanded by the conductor. Conductors need to be educated in vocal technique so the amateur and professional voice is allowed to be developed freely in a choral setting. A study in association with Opera Australia found that there was no significant change in vibrato rate in solo versus opera chorus singing, but reminds us of the inherent problems facing the singer in a choral setting. It is here that the singing teacher worries about technical conflict; singing in a choir for many voice teachers necessitates an entirely new technique. But do they need a new technique, or is it a lack of technical and stylistic knowledge that it hindering them? Betty Jeanne Chipman writes that a “…vocal mechanism that is balanced correctly will produce a beautiful and expressive tone with just the right vibrato rate.” The studio voice, combined with the understanding of vowel resonance and placement is far more beneficial for the singer and conductor in the choral setting, rather than the singer manipulating their voice to create a perceived choral sound.

As a teacher of singing I have many fine young singers who sing in choirs at a very high level as well as being voice majors at university. I have found that it is when they try to remove their vibrato that their choral singing is compromised. When they sing in their studio voice, they are a much more useful member of the choir and as I have mentioned earlier, prominent New Zealand singing teacher Isabel Cunningham says; “One voice, one technique. There is only one way to use the voice effectively and without strain.”

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27 As the conductor often acts as vocal coach, it is clear that they do need to be educated in vocal pedagogy. Books written primarily for choral conductors including texts by Smith and Sataloff, Davids and LaTour, and Ward-Steinmann (see bibliography) promote this.
29 Chipman, Singing with the Mind, 95.
30 Isabel Cunningham, e-mail message to the author, November 14, 2012.
When a choir sings together in a way that sounds like many voices singing as one so that no individual voice is heard above another, it is commonly called choral blend. This can pose problems for the young voice major who wants to sing in a choir and may be required to sing in a choir, but still has not consolidated their vocal technique, causing them to be heard above the choir and giving the conductor no end of strife. In common choral practice, there are many obvious reasons for a lack of choral blend: a singer who sings too loudly or too softly, is singing the wrong part, standing in the wrong place, singing in the wrong type of choir, are typical examples. When singing in a large symphony chorus of a hundred voices or more, blend is not going to be as much of an issue as individual voices are generally not heard, and when singing in a cathedral choir, the acoustic typically takes care of the blend. However, when singing in a chamber choir or small ensemble, anecdotal evidence suggests that certain solo voices cannot participate without significant modification to their solo technique. As the late Margaret Hillis, former conductor of the Chicago Symphony Chorus once remarked: “I can tell when I work with a solo singer whether they have sung in a good chorus or not … [i]f they haven’t I’m constantly having to shush them or bring them up.”

In Elizabeth Ekholm’s study on choral blend, she refers to choral blend as “homogeneity of choral tone.” Henry Leck says that the “key to a beautiful sound is vocal blend” and concludes that unmatched vowels will result in voices not blending. Allen Goodwin describes choral blend as “an ensemble sound in which individual voices are not separately discernible to a listener,” and adds that “approaches requiring singers to modify their solo vocal production for the sake of ensemble blend have sometimes led to controversy among choral directors and voice teachers.” Brenda Smith and Robert Sataloff refer to choral blend as “a sound uniting or ‘blending’ all participatory voices.” But this idea changes from choir to conductor to culture. “Choral tone is a cultivated sound specific to each choir, and each conductor” and “Knutson (1987) defines this blend as ‘…a product of sound where each element becomes unified or homogenized,’ as determined by the conductor.”

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31 See glossary.
32 Margaret Hillis, interview with Bruce Duffie.
33 Ekholm, “Effect of Singing Mode,” 125.
34 Leck and Jordan, Creating Artistry, 171.
35 Leck and Jordan, Creating Artistry, 21.
38 Smith and Sataloff, Choral Pedagogy, 138.
39 Ibid.
I believe that Smith and Sataloff have the right answer: blend has much to do with the conductor and the culture of the choir. A North American choir is going to sound very different from an English choir, due to the natural placement of the speaking voices; a North American choir will always have more, to use the Estill\textsuperscript{41} term, twang\textsuperscript{42} than an English choir. However, this does not help with a working definition of what conductors need to do to achieve a satisfactory choral blend. Soloistic singing in Ekholm’s study “…was praised for greater freedom of phonation, enhanced breath support and projection, and better intonation.”\textsuperscript{43} Nevertheless, other studies have shown that when singing in a choir, soloistically-trained singers will use fewer upper formants than in their choral singing, allowing the individuality of the voice to be diminished and therefore more homogeneity of sound.\textsuperscript{44} In my own experience, like the anecdotal evidence of other soloists, I have found that I sing flat when I take the upper partials away. Therefore, the question of whether it is possible to achieve this choral blend without the need to diminish the upper partials, and consequently sing unmusically remains.

It is worth attempting to define the choral technique implied in the conflict between soloistic technique and choral blend, but for the most part, the singing technique and style of the average choral singer is largely ignored in these studies. There is plenty of scope for an academic analysis of healthy technique for the amateur choral singer (and indeed, the amateur choral conductor). Although this study is focussed on the soloist in ensemble, many singers choose to sing contrary to soloistic technique out of a cultural or musical preference for a perceived choral sound. Moreover, if the conductor wants a sound where the women are expected to take on the vocal colour of boy trebles, this can unwittingly have a detrimental effect on a willing singer desperately trying to listen to the singers around them, blend, and achieve the sound they believe their conductor wants. As Ekholm writes:

\textit{Singers may develop strategies for enhancing choral blend through experience with conductors who, explicitly or implicitly, encourage blended vocal production. The choral conductors’ preference for blended singing over soloistic singing supports this hypothesis. Furthermore, singers may be influenced by general acculturation to}

\textsuperscript{41} The Estill method uses terms such as twang, sob and cry to describe various different vocal placements. MacDonald Klimek, \textit{Estill Voice Training System: Level One and Two}.

\textsuperscript{42} See glossary.

\textsuperscript{43} Ekholm, “Effect of Singing Mode,” 132.

\textsuperscript{44} Goodwin, Daugherty, Aspaas et al, and Sundberg.
a choral aesthetic that values homogeneity of tone. This is evidenced by choristers’ preference for choral sound in the blended singing mode over the soloistic mode. Choristers may thus face a dilemma. They may be divided between (a) respect for the choral aesthetic of homogeneity of tone and (b) desire to sing in a way that promotes freedom of phonation.\textsuperscript{45}

As a singing teacher in New Zealand, I deal with female singers in their thirties and forties who still think they that have to sing like a boy soprano to stay in a choir, even if the conductor wants a free and vibrant sound. Choral blend is often mistaken for the removal of vocal colour and vibrato and in my experience it is singers who do this who find it difficult to remain in a choir at national/professional level. These singers find it hard to blend with the mature voices around them, because they do not sing with vocal freedom. I have found that problems with intonation and vocal fatigue in choir can usually be fixed in an individual singer when they stop singing as if they were in choir and just sing as their teacher expects them to in studio. According to the literature surveyed below, an unblended choral sound appears to result from a combination of conductors not understanding vocal technique and misguidedly suggesting the wrong thing to achieve choral blend, and singers attempting to modify their own sound within the ensemble, according to what they hear, rather than relying on solid vocal technique.

Many conductors use voice-matching to allow singers to have more vocal freedom within the choir, as Aspaas et al explain: “Voice matching, is a highly subjective procedure that uses pitch, intensity, timbre, vowel formation, and vibrato rate to place singers of the same voice part next to other singers throughout their section.”\textsuperscript{46} I believed that voice-matching was integral to achieving choral blend, but it is not the only way to achieve choral blend; uniformity of vowels and chorister positioning is just as important and in some cases more important.\textsuperscript{47} It does not matter how expertly matched the voices are; if there is no uniformity of vowel, the choir will not blend.

\textit{Vowels must be unified within the group. If one singer is singing “uh” while the others sing “ah” their voices will not blend beautifully. They must keep the sound}

\textsuperscript{45} Ekholm, “Effect of Singing Mode,” 132.
\textsuperscript{47} Smith and Sataloff, Choral Pedagogy, 139-140
ideal in their minds while listening, and match the timbre of those singing around them.  

Improper vowel formation can cause many problems with blend, however “…when the tone is resonant, it flows from the body as vibrant sound energy…” allowing for a unified vowel and vocal blend. Gumm observes that “[w]hen individual choir members do not pronounce words the same way, the affect is the same as beating between dissimilar pitches.” I know from my work with choirs, that unity of vowel is a vital part of achieving a choral blend and a great deal of time is spent on this. Each chorister having an understanding of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is integral to this. As leading American pedagogue Marvin Keenze says:

*When the word is beautifully shaped, the vowel is beautifully shaped and the phonation is better because the tuned-in, resonant vowel frees up the vibrator.*  
*When the vibrator is right, the breath works better.*

Aspaas, McCrea, Morris and Fowler in their 2004 research note that “[m]any conductors believe that the formation or arrangement of singers greatly influences the blend of the ensemble.” Numerous studies have looked at this phenomenon, examining how the perception of a chorister changes when standing in different positions. In response to Daugherty’s 1999 findings (choristers preferred mixed formation), Aspaas *et al* hypothesised that a choir standing in a mixed formation would allow singers to sing with a soloistic technique in comparison to the “block sectional and sectional by columns formations.” [Table 3.1] These results showed that “…when sopranos are placed in a mixed formation, they get to stand closer to singers with softer voices, and so their ability to hear others increases.” Yet the Basses tended to favour the column formation as they could hear the other members of their section and therefore “…could better appreciate the blend of the entire chorus.” However, an important finding in the research of Aspaas,

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49 Gumm, “Musical and Technical Sources of Choral Dynamics,” 34.  
50 Ibid.  
51 See glossary.  
56 Ibid, 23.  
McCrea et al, and the earlier findings of Daugherty, is that mixed formation gave the best acoustical conditions for the majority of singers to hear the other parts and in turn they were able to sing with a better perception of blend. Interestingly though, the differences in sound perceived by the singers over the three formations was not seen acoustically in the data from the experiment.

**Table 3.1.** Three formations according to voice part.58

Table 3.1 removed for copyright reasons.

This table can be found on page 14 of Christopher Aspaas, Christopher R. McCrea, Richard J. Morris and Linda Fowler’s “Select Acoustic and Perceptual Measures of Choral Formation.”


The research therefore suggests that conductors should not trust the ears of their choristers when dealing with the issues of blend and colour. Margaret Hillis said of mixed formation “…they can hear better and can make chamber music better that way, but you can’t control the dynamic of an individual section as well.”59 She often rehearsed her choir in mixed formation so singers could hear better and therefore assess their technique throughout the rehearsal with more ease but reverted to sectional formation for the concert.

58 Ibid., 14.
59 Margaret Hillis, interview by Bruce Duffie.
Hillis continues: “One of the most interesting points about [Daugherty’s] research was that 95.6% of the choristers reported that they felt spacing influenced choral sound.” In a choir with wide spacing, the singers have a much better chance of hearing themselves and being able to gauge whether they are blending or not. Of course this is not always possible when the stage or the choir platform is too small. Singers need to learn how to blend without being able to hear and this can often be achieved by paying attention to the uniform placement of the vowel.

Daugherty observed that the singers in his research group felt that they were able to sing with better vocal technique when they were spaced an arm’s length or more apart. The conductor of the research choir noted that “…the random arrangements [with spacing] produced a fairly even balance; I had expected problems with strong voices dominating.” This wide spacing of the choir and mixed formation appears to aid in choral blend more than voice matching did for this choir.

When singing in a large ensemble “…the acoustical load is much larger and more complex than in solo singing.” Having singers around you with different voice types, techniques and colours can be difficult for any singer and when a singer with a more soloistic technique can no longer hear themselves, the studio technique can be compromised as the singer will often start to push. In a study by Ternström and Sundberg it was found that a choir will sing at 80 decibels. A sound being heard at a constant 80 decibel level is very dangerous to one’s hearing and in one case during the study “…in the soprano section, a 115 decibel sound pressure level occurred several times.” Within the ear is the smallest striated muscle in the body, the *stapedius*. This muscle contracts (acoustic reflex) so hearing is not damaged when loud noises occur. With the large amount of auditory sound
coming from the choir and the acoustic reflex of the stapedius muscle\textsuperscript{70}, it is very important to remember that “…singers are at an acoustical disadvantage when it comes to hearing themselves. This aural loss\textsuperscript{71} is precisely why the ability to sing by sensation is so vital for the solo singer in a choral setting.”\textsuperscript{72} In fact, it is important for the amateur singer as well because it fosters a good technique throughout the whole ensemble.

It is all very well to consider how singers perceive themselves to be singing when in a choir, but the sound they hear and the sound twenty metres away in the audience is very different. It is essential for singing teachers and choral directors to focus on what the feeling of the sound is when it is right, rather than telling them to listen all the time. Vocal sensation is a key element for a soloist and a chorister, and Scott McCoy talks of the vibrations within the body as being the “…the singer’s private resonance; the singer feels them, but nobody else hears them.”\textsuperscript{73} As a soloist, when singing in an extremely dull acoustic, one must draw on sensory knowledge as one performs, and for the chorister, this same sensory knowledge should be used.\textsuperscript{74} As Marvin Keenze observes “…it is the ear that sings.”\textsuperscript{75} Time in the studio should be focused on how does that feel? How did that phrase sound or feel different to the previous phrase? If working with sensory knowledge has not been focused on in lessons, the soloist and chorister will push in an attempt to get some aural feedback from the room resulting in a compromised sound.\textsuperscript{76} This pushing is known as the Lombard Effect: “The Lombard effect is a phenomenon in which a speaker or singer involuntarily raises his or her vocal intensity in the presence of high levels of sound.”\textsuperscript{77} As Margaret Olson discusses, “…this phenomenon may pose some risk to the singer. Any subconscious pushing or forcing of the voice for an extended time can cause fatigue or long-term damage to the voice.”\textsuperscript{78} It is perhaps worth investigating whether an opposite effect occurs in singers attempting to create a so-called blended sound. Possibilities could be that when the chorister sings quietly so they can hear the person beside them, their support and breath pressure decreases resulting in a breathy, non-vibrant sound. If there is

\textsuperscript{70} See glossary.
\textsuperscript{71} Approximately a 20 decibel reduction in sound waves travelling to the inner ear. Borg and Zakrisson, “Stapedius reflex,” 525.
\textsuperscript{72} Olson, “Rehearsal Break,” 45-47.
\textsuperscript{73} McCoy, Your Voice, 28.
\textsuperscript{74} Meribeth Bunch says that singers “…eventually find their …pattern of sensations…become consistent as they study and practice. Bunch, Dynamics of the Singing Voice, 116.
\textsuperscript{75} Blades-Zeller, A Spectrum of Voices, 33.
\textsuperscript{76} This also relates to the level of the technique of the singer.
\textsuperscript{77} Tonkinson, “The Lombard Effect in Choral Singing.” This study by Steven Tonkinson concluded that participants were affected by the Lombard Effect when they were unable to hear properly.
\textsuperscript{78} Olson, Solo Singer, 144.
an opposite effect, this could be useful in finding ways to help maintain an even breath pressure and even vibrancy within the choir.

The literature as it stands suggests that space between the singers has more merit to achieving choral blend while maintaining vocal health than modification of tone or voice matching, and that sensory knowledge of one’s technique outweighs aural perception. Like most things in choirs, this is essentially the conductor’s problem and requires a greater knowledge of vocal technique in the training of conductors. Hillis is also quoted as saying that “[c]horuses are a good recommendation if the choral conductor is good.”79 It is worth repeating that choral blend is problematically subjective, changing from choir to choir. Conductors primarily “…influence singing technique, vowel formation, manner of attack and release, aspects of legato and articulation, and other factors that allow the sound to be moulded to the conductor’s intent.”80 While every conductor has their own style and sound concept, there are still conductors who do not know enough about good vocal technique and, consequently, vocal health becomes a secondary issue to the goal of blend. However singing teachers can help the choral blend by focussing on thin-fold and messa di voce exercises, as well as finding the vocal resonance81 for the individual singer that encourages blend.

There is no one way to define choral blend other than the particular sound quality an individual conductor wants. There are many ways for this to be achieved healthily: a soloistic technique is not contrary to the needs of choral singing. In the chapter “There’s a soprano in the altos!” I look at how singers with a soloist’s quality can function within a choir successfully. Choral singing is a genre of singing no different from the technical demands of singing Verdi and Monteverdi in the same concert. Singing teachers are required to teach the different techniques and vocal qualities required for baroque, classical, romantic and contemporary art music, but many will not teach how to sing choral music for fear that it is not a valid part of a soloist’s training. Choral singing requires an extraordinarily sophisticated vocal technique to sing at the highest levels and this needs instruction. Professional British choir, The Sixteen, are committed to this and have established Genesis Sixteen, a yearlong programme whose aim is to “…identify the next generation of ensemble choral singers and to give them the opportunity to train at the

79 Margaret Hillis, interview by Bruce Duffie.
80 Smith and Sataloff, Choral Pedagogy, 139.
81 Please see chapter 4, page 71 for the different areas of resonance.
highest level.” With the promotion of the choral pathway at high levels, pedagogues now need to bring this into their own studio teaching. Edwards writes: “Inviting each student to spend a periodic five minutes of a voice lesson on issues concerning their choral repertoire or choral singing would be a sound investment in their overall singing development.”

While many conductors need to learn how the soloistic voice works within an ensemble, and how all singers can benefit from a free and vibrant sound, teachers of singing need to teach choral music as another important genre in a singer’s repertoire so that many misnomers about the dangers of singing in a choir can be put to rest. In doing this they can give their pupils more opportunities as they look for work as a professional singer.

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82 Christophers, “Genesis Sixteen.” Having a training-choir like this in New Zealand would be wonderful.
83 Edwards, Music Makers, 36-37.
4 There’s a soprano in the altos!

In the majority of choirs worldwide, with the exception of major professional choirs, there are always going to be singers “singing out of part.” Typical examples of this are a soprano singing as a choral alto, or a tenor singing as a choral bass.\(^1\) There are many reasons for this, but for most choirs it comes down to numbers. There are always fewer natural altos and tenors, but an excess of sopranos and baritones does not aid in achieving a balanced choir. In some choirs there are even females singing tenor when there are very few tenors available. Technically it would make sense that “singing out of part” is detrimental to a singer’s vocal technique, but for a number of singers, this is advantageous.\(^2\)

University-age voice majors or professional singers who also wish to sing choral music often find it hard to sing in their correct voice classification, especially for the higher voices. In an art form that promotes blend and uniformity of sound, having a strong soloistic voice “cutting” through the sound is problematic for both the singer and conductor. It is technically demanding and often demoralising for a singer to be constantly told to sing quietly, and difficult for a conductor when there is a singer or singers cutting out the upper harmonics in the voice in order to blend resulting in flat singing. A number of pedagogues today advise these singers to sing “out of part,” and an operatically trained soprano, like myself, can consequently become a skilled choral alto.

Like many singers, I began my singing training as part of a choir, and like many children who showed musical talent and could hold another part against the tune, I was placed in the alto section. It was not until I started high school that my soprano voice was found. I began lessons and started singing in one of the top school choirs in the country. Unlike many schools, the choral programme at my high school was such that the majority of singers sang in their actual voice classification rather than having the better musicians singing alto. By the time I was in my final year at school, I had to attempt to modify my vocal technique, albeit unsuccessfully at times, in order to blend. When I began performance studies at The University of Auckland it was a requirement of the Bachelor of Music degree to sing in a choir. I enjoyed my time in the choir, although my university tutor was reluctant to have

\(^1\) The natural voice is a middle voice, therefore a balanced choir will require some choristers to sing in a part that is not their natural voice classification.

me participate. In choir, as my voice developed, I found it harder to sing as a soprano, and by the final year of my degree the decision was made that I would stop singing in choirs and focus exclusively on my solo studies. During my time as a postgraduate student at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), I again had to sing in the Academy’s large chorus like every voice student and I was also required to audition for the RAM’s Chamber Choir, which I sang in for two years, with the reluctance of my teacher. So it may seem strange that a decade after finishing my postgraduate studies, and despite a busy career as a soprano soloist in opera, oratorio, and recital, I spend much of my time working with choirs. I now also sing in a top level chamber choir, but as an alto. This raises the question of whether I could have stayed chorally in my twenties if I had made the move to being a choral alto. For a vibrant soprano voice, singing Alto 1 could be described as a technically relaxing sing for me for the following reasons: (1) I do not feel vocal strain, as I do not have to sing quietly all time in the high tessitura; and (2) I am able to sing in the middle part of my voice without the fear of being heard above the texture. The reason this may have not been an option for me as a student was perhaps that I was not technically ready.

American baritone Thomas Hampson is positive about the training that choral ensembles give to singers but says that choral singing

...for a real solo voice [can] be detrimental at some point...Each individual needs to determine the correct time to pursue solo work exclusively.³

Leading New Zealand pedagogue Isabel Cunningham also believes that there is a point when singers with solo potential should stop singing in a choir. However, she says that “Once the voice is working freely throughout the range, and [if] the singer will be in a choir with other voices of similar timbre…”⁴ she would not object to them singing in a choir again. At university, with the growing size of my voice, I did not have the requisite technical skills to function properly in a choir and when a new technique is being developed for some singers, choral singing is more of a hindrance than a help. Cunningham also suggests that:

³ Thomas Hampson in Solo Singer, xvii
⁴ Isabel Cunningham, e-mail to the author 2012.
Many choristers sing with a “familiar” sound which is often not their natural sound. Training a solo voice requires the development of new neural pathways. Continuing to sing in “old” ways militates against development of the solo instrument. I have found that I cannot teach students the day after their choir practice because they are vocally exhausted from repetitive and “mindless” use of the voice. This affects sopranos and tenors more than any other voice type. Also, as the voice develops in colour, it often sticks out in a choir, so the singer is asked to sing more quietly. Because correct soft singing is the most difficult skill to acquire, the singer clamps down in the throat to try to match the quality around him/her, with disastrous results.5

Is it the “mindless” and repetitive use of the voice chorally that singing teachers have issue with? In Margaret Olson’s recent book The Solo Singer in the Choral Setting,6 she writes that choral singing is an important part of the solo singer’s training and that there are many ways to get around the technical issues of singing in choir while training and singing as a soloist. One of the main issues that is evident, and more so in American universities than in New Zealand, is that apart from the singers’ own personal practice, the number of hours of choral training required in many degree programmes outweigh solo study. This amount of choral singing requires a lot of stamina and technical ability that young singers have often not yet developed. [Table 4.1]

From this information we can gather that a young singer with a developing technique is likely to sing more as a chorister than a soloist, so it could be argued that a conductor can have more influence on vocal technique than the actual teacher. The American pedagogue Dale Moore asks:

*If the choral conductor has a strong, dynamic personality and very firm ideas, right or wrong, about vocal technique, need one ask who will have the greater influence upon the singer?*7

It is therefore extremely important what part a singer sings and how this is going to influence their vocal technique, especially for the upper voices because of the difficulty of sustaining vocal lines due to the often high tessitura. Moore says that;

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5 Isabel Cunningham, e-mail to the author, 2012.
6 Olson, Solo Singer.
I would rather have a soprano of potentially operatic calibre serving as part of a cheerleading squad than have her singing in a group where the tonal ideal for a soprano is the sound of a tired English choirboy.  

Table 4.1 Comparison of solo and choral instruction in university degree programmes, USA - NZ

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<th>AVERAGE USA UNIVERSITY</th>
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<td>CHORAL TRAINING</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 4 hours a week in choral rehearsal</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 512 hours minimum singing in a choir throughout their four year degree</td>
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<td>SOLO TRAINING</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 1 hour singing lesson a week</td>
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<td>- 128 hours of lessons over the four year degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHORAL TRAINING</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Choral Studies – part of the Applied Musicianship course</td>
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<td>- 1 hour a week for 2 years</td>
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<td>- 48 hours over the course of a three year degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Auckland Chamber Choir (auditioned group) – not a requirement for graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 2 ½ hours rehearsal a week</td>
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<td>- 180 hours minimum of rehearsals plus extra rehearsals and concerts over a three year degree.</td>
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<td>SOLO TRAINING</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 1 hour lesson a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 128 hours of lessons over the degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>- An average of 40mins vocal coaching a week</td>
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<td>- Minimum of 20 hours over a 3 year degree</td>
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CHORAL VS SOLO

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<td>- 512 hours of choral instruction vs 128 hours of solo instruction – Four-year degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 228 hours of choral instruction vs 98 hours of solo instruction – Three-year degree</td>
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9 Olson, The Solo Singer, 23.
10 Average hours of study for a University of Auckland BMus voice performance major hours in solo and choral singing, 2012.
Fortunately the “tired English choirboy” colour is becoming less desired. Margaret Olson gives a number of examples in her book as to what to do with sopranos who are finding it difficult singing Soprano 1 in a choir and in all but one example she advises for the singer to sing a lower part, or at least become a pivot singer, changing voice parts as the repertoire demands. However, one example discusses the case of a 44-year-old graduate soprano who has sung as a professional for many years with a wide-ranging repertoire including the works of Wagner. She is required to sing in a choir, but insists on singing Soprano 1. This is not at all conducive to the even blend of the choir and it is suggested to her that she sing Alto 1. She will not “…as her technique has worked well for her over many years of a successful career, so she is reluctant to change it…”\(^{11}\) It is suggested that she becomes a diction consultant to the choir so she fulfils the required choral component of her studies. Perhaps her refusal to sing Alto 1 has more to do with pride than technique.

Singing in a choir or ensemble while maintaining a successful solo career is the norm for many singers in the UK, Europe, and North America. Groups like the BBC Singers, Polyphony, the Berlin Rundfunk, or the Texas-based Conspirare are all choral groups made up of soloists. New Zealand soprano Anna Leese\(^ {12}\) sings in the highly successful ensemble Prince Consort as well as having an exciting career on the operatic stage. However, despite these examples, the decision to sing as a chorister while being a professional soloist is never an easy one especially in New Zealand. Does it mean one has failed as a solo singer? My answer to that is “certainly not!” However, to sing in a choir in New Zealand it has to be under the right conditions. In New Zealand we have one semi-professional chamber choir, Voices New Zealand, and there is the Auckland choir Viva Voce which uses a number of singers who also sing in the NBR NZ Opera Chorus. Ensemble singing in groups such as these allows the trained soloist to perform the choral repertoire that would otherwise be unavailable to them. So, as I continue to find out, it often comes down to the individual singer and the choir or ensemble they are working with. I will never know what singing a lower part chorally at university age would have done to my solo voice, but there are many singers in New Zealand who have sung with the National Choirs during their university studies and have gone on to have successful careers.\(^ {13}\)

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\(^ {11}\) Olson, *Solo Singer*, 69-70.

\(^ {12}\) Anna Leese.

\(^ {13}\) See Appendix 4, page 125.
While singing in a choir is not a venue for “practising,” it can be a place to work on technical issues especially if the conductor is sympathetic to the technical demands of the voice. The choral conductor Edward Byrom writes that “[t]he more choral conductors know about the voice, about their own voices, and about the voices of those they conduct, the more effective they will be in achieving a quality choral sound with their ensembles.”  

However one problem that I did encounter when I first started singing as a choral alto was that I was running out of breath quickly. As a soprano soloist I do not often sing in the alto tessitura, and consequently I did not support the sound enough to enable me to sing with good stamina. I found that singing with my solo support is essential to my choral singing.

Colin Baldy, singer and singing teacher who is celebrated for his training of the singers in the choir of New College, Oxford, writes that singers:

...often complain that singing in choirs feels very different from solo singing, and that their voices tire easily....If singers are encouraged to sing out, they will all be singing properly, the resulting sound will be electrifying....As we know, singing quietly actually requires more intensity than singing loudly...Twenty people singing with a total sense of involvement, coupled with thin folds...will produce an intense piano...The body must be engaged at all times, no matter how quietly or loudly you are singing.

So I had fallen into the same trap as so many young singers: I forgot to support.

Singing in the “wrong voice part” is an everyday occurrence in the choral world. A choir would not be properly balanced if everyone sang in their true voice type. In the New Zealand context, celebrated international tenor Simon O’Neill sang as a baritone in the NZ Youth Choir in the early 1990s, it is in this choir and the NZ Secondary Students’ Choir that he says “…gave [him] the love of singing and making fine music.” Soprano Madeleine Pierard (who has recently finished her term as a Jette-Parker Young artist at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden), sang alto in both the NZ Youth Choir and Voices NZ as she was changing from mezzo to soprano. She says that it is the ensemble singing “…that is the major appeal of opera…” for her. There are also many high baritones who

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14 Byrom quoted in Olson, 37.
15 Baldy, The Student Voice, back cover.
16 Ibid., 121-122.
17 O’ Neill, Life Lessons.
18 Pierard, 10 Questions.
sing Tenor 2 when there are not enough tenors, and there are never enough tenors!\(^{19}\) One thing a female singer must never do is sing tenor, even if they can sing down to D3 or E3, but this can be seen in many provincial choirs and choral societies.\(^{20}\) As Chipman asserts, “…it can limit female singers to the point that they will never be able to shift out of the heavy mechanism, thus severely limiting the possibility of being a solo performer.”\(^{21}\) Despite this, singing a lower part is always a favourable move according to the late pedagogue James C. McKinney, who was Distinguished Professor of Voice at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, because “…there are fewer dangers in singing too low than there are in singing too high.\(^{22}\)” Moving down a part is not for everyone, and for the light soprano it is often very difficult as the lower notes are not always there.

Studies by Rossing, Sundberg, and Goodwin\(^{23}\) showed that solo singing produces higher overtones\(^{24}\) than choral singing, and yet in my own experience singing soprano chorally, it has been the removal of these high overtones that got me into trouble. The moment I removed the higher overtones from my sound it resulted in flat pitching, or the perception that I was singing flat. In order to compensate I had to change my vowel position or pitch sharper in order to be in tune and blend, through artificially raising the larynx. So far singing alto has not caused vocal health problems due to strain and fatigue. I do, however, have to remember to sing on thin fold as I get up to D4 and beyond. Davids and LaTour observe that “sopranos sing at pitch levels in a range where the human ear is keenly sensitive…”\(^{25}\) so it is important to note that while there is a perception that they are louder, they are not, and this causes problems for a richer-voiced soprano trying to sing on top of the texture in a choir. Studies\(^{26}\) have shown that “…sopranos depend upon a strong fundamental frequency at the upper end of their range to be heard well—they cannot

\(^{19}\) Prominent tenor voices can also be problematic in the choral setting. Richard Miller suggests the use of falsetto when there is vocal strain in the upper register. Miller, *Solutions for Singers*, 240.

\(^{20}\) In this piece from the New York Times, Roberta Hershenson writes of there being ten female tenors in the choir of 200 she sings in. Hershenson, “Vocalizing; Female Tenor Tells All.”

\(^{21}\) Chipman, *Singing with the Mind, Body and Soul*, 137.

\(^{22}\) McKinney, *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*, 109.


\(^{24}\) See glossary.

\(^{25}\) Davids and LaTour, *Vocal Technique*, 195.

depend upon the singer’s formant in this region of their voices…”27 in the way that other voice types can. Therefore, it is the vibrato in the voice that helps carry it to the back of the hall and this is where problems occur for the operatically trained soprano in a choir or ensemble when singing high. So singing ‘down a part’ seems to be logical for the operatically trained soprano with a large, vibrant voice.

New Zealand mezzo-soprano Kate Spence28 and I were undergraduate students together in the 1990s at the University of Auckland. Since being back in NZ, we have sung frequently together as soloists, often in works that require a large amount of ensemble singing, most recently in the NZ Youth Choir and NZSO National Youth Orchestra’s performance of Tippett’s A Child of our Time, and the NZSO’s Die Walküre. Kate Spence sang in choirs at high school and university, though is proud to admit that she was unsuccessful in her NZSSC audition. While she was training in Brisbane, like many singers, including me, she sang professionally in a church choir. Her own voice classification was a much longer road than mine: she sang as a soprano until her second year at university. She says that as a soprano

...I couldn't make headway...It wasn’t until I was singing at a Hawkes Bay Summer School that...[t]wo of the tutors, Rosemary Gordon and Beatrice Webster stopped the session, looked at one another…and it was all downhill, or at least down pitch from there.29

She remembers her high notes being thin and unsupported, but when her breath management and support developed, a mezzo colour appeared. As time went on her voice got richer and lower, and she would now classify herself as a low mezzo. However, Kate does not see singing in a choir as an option for her. The size of her middle and lower voice and the harmonics that are present would be too much to blend with other singers, and singing soprano would never be an option, since singing at that register for long periods is too taxing on the voice. As she says, for lower mezzo-sopranos, singing high notes piano is more like mezzo forte!

In the same way two violinists or pianists would discuss the merits of using certain fingering for particular phrases, Kate and I have discussed the harmonic structure of our voices. I have included a spectrographic comparison of our two voices, using the

27 Davids and LaTour, Vocal Technique, 140.
28 Discussion with Kate Spence 28/09/12
29 Dart, “Contralto brings her special style to Bach.”
Voiceprint software\textsuperscript{30} developed by Estill Voice International to examine why it is appropriate for me to sing alto in a choir, and why my voice is more suitable for this than Kate’s.

A well-resonated tone “…has four or five overtones focused into narrow bands of energy, with a strong overtone (called the singer’s formant) in the area of 2800-3200 Hz.”\textsuperscript{31} And it is that a classical singer tries to cultivate in order to project to the back of an auditorium or over an orchestra. As I have already mentioned, lower female voices use the singer’s formant more than sopranos. Sopranos rely on the upper-partials formed by vibrato. This is clearly shown in the following voiceprints.

![Voiceprint graphs]

\textbf{Figure 4.1} Morag, then Kate singing the vowel \([i]\) on A4 (A440)

When comparing the two graphs in [4.1], it is clear that I have more upper-partials than Kate. In this example it is especially noticeable from 3700Hz and above. Kate has a much stronger band of harmonics than I do between 2000 and 3000Hz.

\textsuperscript{30} Voiceprint version 5.5.
\textsuperscript{31} Blades-Zeller, \textit{A Spectrum of Voices}, 35.
In [4.2] I have more upper-partial than Kate; however Kate has stronger harmonics nearer the fundamental than I do, with more ring at the singer’s formant of 3000Hz. It would be harder for Kate to blend this in a choral setting.

[4.3] shows that there are many more harmonics apparent in Kate’s voice than mine at such a low pitch.

[4.4] shows the harmonic richness in my voice especially in a high tessitura, and this is why I do not sing soprano in a choir.
The harmonics from the fundamental to 4000Hz and beyond are extremely strong, and it is these harmonics that solo singers develop to enable them to sing over an orchestra, even while singing softly. In [4.2] this band of energy is not as strong in the lower part of my voice enabling me, or a soprano of a similar voice type to be able to sing as an alto in a choir and blend.

As you can see at the beginning and end of the *messa di voce*, I am able to manipulate the harmonic structure of the note and therefore am able to choose how I sing each note in order to blend appropriately for the repertoire in front of me. This manipulation of the harmonic structure can ultimately be done by changing the resonance position of the vowel.
Depending on the colour required, more or less head, chest, nasal, and or back resonance can be added or subtracted.

For any solo soprano who misses singing the choral repertoire, there are options out there. It is of course possible to sing in a choir when blend and balance is not as important so solo voices can sing out, but, if the solo soprano wants to sing in a choir where blend and balance is an important factor in promoting musical artistry, singing alto is an option. If the singer can meet the technical demands, it can become a fulfilling part of the singer’s professional musical life. It is common for most sopranos to know both parts of the Lakmé, Così and Barcarolle duets, and most would be happy singing the Soprano 2 solo parts of masses where there is an ensemble movement. In many ways this is no different to singing alto in a choir. For the soprano singing as a choral alto, she is given the freedom to sing with a full voice with a full harmonic structure, on an uncompromised technique, and in a way that means she will not constantly be told to “be quiet!”
Chamber Music or the ‘music of friends’ is music written for the chamber, or the room, rather than the large concert hall or church. From the early chamber settings of Haydn and Boccherini, to works by Beethoven, Brahms and Spohr, the chamber music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, grew out of the “…demise of western European aristocracy…[where] courtly ensembles were replaced by domestic gatherings, often of amateur musicians.” Chamber Music was at the centre of middle-class entertainment, and for many musicians it was a vehicle to becoming a member of polite, even aristocratic society, and gave the nobility the possibility of playing music with professionals. As Carl Dahlhaus explains, “In England, a musician who played at private concerts was given the option of accepting payment or of being treated as a gentleman belonging to “Society”- in other words, as an amateur instead of a professional.” Similarly, Goethe said that chamber music was “…a means, if not to eliminate class distinctions, at least to forget them for a while.” Where opera and the theatre were places to watch the upper classes and nobility in the boxes, chamber music was a place for the middle classes and professionals to perform with them.

Three of my recitals Songs of these Islands, The Intimate Voice, and The Soloist as an Ensemble Singer have explored the different nature of chamber music, from song with piano, to voice or voices with instrumental ensemble accompaniments. The recitals aimed to show the techniques, musicianship, and artistry needed by a singer in chamber music to be an effective soloist and collaborative artist in an ensemble setting.

When the term chamber music is used, it is “…usually applied to instrumental music…” such as string quartets, piano trios and small instrumental ensembles. However, vocal music makes up a large part of the chamber music repertoire in the form of the song literature (e.g. lieder, chanson) for one voice and piano, duets and vocal ensembles, and

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2 Oxford Dictionary of Music, s.v. “Chamber Music.”
2 Radice, Chamber Music, 1.
3 Charles Burney in his journal written during a tour of Germany remarked on the musical skill of many aristocrats, namely the King of Prussia who studied flute with Joachim Quantz (chamber-musician in ordinary to the King), was well known as a skilled flautist, and the Electoral Highness of Dresden who “…was so good a musician as to accompany readily, and in a masterly manner, on the harpsichord, at sight.” Burney, Present State of Music, 97, 114 and 134.
4 Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 43.
5 Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 43.
6 See Appendix 2 for the programme.
7 The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music, s.v. “Chamber Music.”
repertoire for voice, piano, and one, or more instruments. This music is an essential part of singers’ repertoire and training: it teaches singers the art of ensemble singing, singing as part of the texture rather than on top of the texture. Chamber music is also the repertoire in which a young singer will often perform with instruments other than the piano for the first time. Yet it is often a genre missed by student singers, since instrumental students generally prefer to collaborate with other instrumentalists and many chamber music competitions do not admit vocal repertoire. Singers are accustomed to “singing” conversations in opera and oratorio, and in my experience they are not always attuned to the skill of being one part of a wider conversation with other instruments, in a genre in which they are not necessarily the virtuosic performer.

The literature focussing on chamber music, its growth in the nineteenth century, and its importance in musical and social development is large, but few publications touch on the subject of vocal chamber music. Nonetheless, singing – or rather the amateur performance of songs and other vocal chamber music – was a universal accomplishment during this period. We only need to read Jane Austen to see the importance of domestic singing and how performers of greater or lesser merit might enjoy the appreciation of the audience. This period also saw the formation of large numbers of choral societies and glee clubs. Significantly, it was increasingly respectable for women to sing in public with men, and “…choral singing in nineteenth-century Germany, England, and even France reached the proportions of a mass movement.” The middle-class “disparaged the professional musician socially” but played with them in string quartets, sang in choral societies, and played in amateur orchestras, as did members of the aristocracy.

The role of women

With vocal chamber music being an integral part of amateur music-making, the virtuosic writing found in instrumental works was not as prevalent in vocal music. Dahlhaus says

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9 This is in my own experience as a young singer and now as a pedagogue.
10 Of the two major chamber music competitions in NZ, the Chamber Music NZ Competition for secondary school aged pupils allows for one voice in a group, yet the Pettman/ROSL Arts Competition worth $50,000 does not.
11 Osborne, “Choral Society.”
13 Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 47.
14 Ibid., 43.
that composers wrote in a style that “…preserved simplicity without the slightest sacrifice of artistic pretence.”\textsuperscript{15} The only instruments that were appropriate for a woman to play were the piano, harp, and of course, the voice, “…during an age when women were regarded first of all as sexual beings, a woman playing the flute, like a woman playing the cello, seems to have been considered an unacceptably suggestive representation of a sexual act.”\textsuperscript{16} Charles Burney writes of Mademoiselle Schmeling, who “…became a singer, by the advice of English ladies, who disliked a \textit{female fiddler}.\textsuperscript{17} Despite the traditional role of women in the home and that they were often seen as a commodity within the family, trading marriage for economic stability or wealth,\textsuperscript{18} women like Elizabeth Fry (social reformer) and Florence Nightingale were “…the pioneers, challenging ingrained predispositions and by their prominence,[and] began the slow process of changing both men’s and women’s attitudes to feminine roles.”\textsuperscript{19} Yet there were often limitations to the musicianship of the well-bred female singer: opera singers tended to come from the working classes, a family already working in the theatre, or perhaps the daughter of a family in service of nobility. The soprano Anna Milder-Hauptman,\textsuperscript{20} for whom Schubert’s \textit{Der Hirt auf dem Felsen D965} was written, was the daughter of a state messenger to the Austrian Ambassador and the wife of a jeweller, whereas Spohr’s \textit{Sechs Deutsche Lieder} were written at the request of Princess Sonderhausen.\textsuperscript{21} Consequently, chamber music became the genre in which a middle-class lady or member of the nobility could be seen performing in the privacy of the “chamber.” There were always exceptions to this, and one only needs to look at the career of Clara Schumann, and the music making of Empress Marie Therese of Austria (1717-80). Marie Therese, as a performer and patron, explored a wide ranging repertoire, including “…complete operas, oratorios, secular cantatas, masses, concertos, symphonies, and chamber music.”\textsuperscript{22}

In spite of a lack of professional opportunity, women were receiving high-level training in increasing numbers. In 1883, there were 335 female finalists in the Royal College of Music Scholarship competition: 185 were pianists, 124 singers, and 18 instrumentalists.\textsuperscript{23} In Boston, after the American Civil War, as middle-class women sought suffrage, the previous

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Dahlhaus, \textit{Nineteenth-Century Music}, 48
\item \textsuperscript{16} Clements, \textit{Situating Schubert}, 137.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Burney, \textit{The Present State of Music}, 110.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Pilbeam, "Bourgeois Society."
\item \textsuperscript{19} Hyde, \textit{New-Found Voices}, 3-4.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Fétis, “Milder-Hauptmann,”142; Waidelich, “Milder, Anna,”202.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Spohr was given a valuable ring in return for writing \textit{Sechs Deutsche Lieder} for Princess Sonderhausen.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Rice, \textit{Empress Marie}, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ehrlich quoted in Potter, \textit{Vocal Authority}, 83.
\end{itemize}
“rules” of musical instrumental propriety were being challenged. Ladies’ quartets such as The Eichberg Quartette were formed, becoming celebrated in their own right. Yet the money and time required mastering a stringed instrument restricted chamber music to “...people with fairly advanced instrumental skills and musical sensibilities.”

The vocal chamber music of the romantic period seems to be relegated to the world of the amateur with private concerts in homes being the mainstay of the genre. Domestic music-making was vitally important to women, we need only recall Miss Bingley’s views discussing the qualities needed by a woman to find a husband in *Pride and Prejudice*:

...no one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word...

In my three recitals featuring chamber music, I presented works that would have been appropriate for a gentlewoman to sing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or works, including twentieth-century and twenty-first-century examples written especially for women that highlight the ensemble techniques required by a soprano whether it be singing with instruments or with fellow singers. And as a female singer in New Zealand it was also essential to feature music from New Zealand. While by European standards our music history is short, chamber music has played an important part in defining New Zealand’s musical identity.

**Chamber Music in New Zealand**

During the colonisation of New Zealand, music was seen as an important part of society. Edward Jerningham Wakefield, son of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, founder of the New Zealand Company, saw it “...as a relief to the solitude of a distant location,” and Edward Brown Fitton who wrote an emigrant’s guide suggested that

“...if a lady were hesitating whether to pay for the freight for her piano or chest of drawers, I would decidedly recommend her to prefer the piano. It will afford more gratification and

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27 The New Zealand Company was set up in 1837 to begin the formal colonisation of New Zealand. Edward Gibbon Wakefield set about to create a “Better Britain” where all classes of people could be prosperous. King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 172.
cheerfulness from the associations aroused by its music than can be supplied by more practically useful furniture.”

Kirstine Moffat’s book *Piano Forte: Stories and Soundscapes from Colonial New Zealand*, follows the history of the piano in New Zealand and its importance in domestic life, literary culture, and how it transcended all classes of society, both Maori and Colonial. It was the accompanying instrument of overwhelming choice for music-making in early New Zealand and was the centre of chamber music. The vocal music of Schubert, Schumann, English Ballads and folk music of the British Isles were an integral part of music evenings in the new colony. Musical societies were formed and amateur music-making in homes was often open to the public. We know from a review of an evening at the Christchurch Musical Union printed in *The Star*, that the vocal numbers performed included an aria from *La Traviata* in English, Lieder and English Song. Chamber groups visiting Australia would sometimes add New Zealand to their tour schedule with the Cherniavsky Trio coming in 1908, 1915 and 1924, and the Verbruggen Quartet in 1920. The contralto Mary Pratt accompanied the Budapest Quartet on their 1937 NZBC tour singing lieder by Wolf, Brahms and Dvořák with pianist Noel Newson.

Chamber Music was becoming an important part of the musical landscape of New Zealand. It was centralised in 1950 with the formation of the New Zealand Music Federation (now Chamber Music New Zealand), and the first singer to tour under its aegis was the Welsh tenor Richard Lewis who performed with the pianist Maurice Till (1957). Lewis had also visited New Zealand nine years earlier. Vocal music featured regularly in subsequent seasons with appearances by the French Baritone Gerard Souzay (1964), the counter-tenor Alfred Deller and the Deller Consort (1964 and 1967), The Philip Todd Trio (1969), Emily Mair (1970), The New Zealand Opera Quartet (1974), the King’s Singers (1975 and 1979), and more recently Jonathan Lemalu (2007), Anna Leese (2008), the Song Company (2010), Voices NZ (2011) and Madeleine Pierard with sister Anna Pierard (2012). These concerts by singers are almost exclusively solo song recitals or recitals by vocal ensembles. Chamber groups featuring instruments and voices have often been left out of

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30 Ibid., 283.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 80.
36 Philip Todd taught voice at the University of Auckland from 1968-82.
38 *Chamber Music New Zealand*, 2011 and 2012.
the programming. Recent exceptions have been Alto with Kristen Darragh, performing music for mezzo-soprano, piano and viola, soprano Pepe Becker and harpist Helen Webby in 2012\textsuperscript{39} and Elixir featuring soprano Kate Lineham in 2011\textsuperscript{40} performing works including Spohr’s Sechs Deutsche Lieder Op.103 and Schubert’s Der Hirt auf dem Felsen, D.965, the centre pieces of the soprano chamber music repertoire. All of these groups featured in the regional tours rather than the main centres. Vocal music, however, appears at least once in each season, whether a soloist or a vocal ensemble.

**Songs of these Islands**

My first doctoral recital *Songs of these Islands* featured music by New Zealand composers and whilst heavily focussing on repertoire for voice and piano, it did feature two pieces for voice, piano and viola (*Five Campbell Songs, Children and Adults*). It also featured music by composers who are well known for their choral compositions (David Hamilton, Anthony Ritchie) and a work by Craig Utting that was originally written for choir. And it is not just composers from New Zealand whose music finds its home in the solo and choral world: Brahms, Schumann, and the American Eric Whitacre also cross this divide. Composers often make arrangements of their works for different numbers of voices and instrumental combinations.\textsuperscript{41} David Hamilton writes in the preface to his *At the Lighting of the Lamps* (1996) score “It represents my first extended writing for solo voice and piano, something which is perhaps surprising given my substantial choral output.”\textsuperscript{42} New Zealand art song is still in its infancy, with only a small number of classical songs being performed regularly. New Zealand Song classes at competitions never attract many entrants: young singers it seems are not drawn to New Zealand music in the same way that they are to English and American Song. Composer and baritone David Griffiths says in writing for voices: “I love their richness, colour and intensity and their correctly directed use.”\textsuperscript{43} The songs that I have performed by New Zealand composers are full of lyricism, wit, extremes of range, dynamics and emotion, and many call for excellent musical skills. *At the Lighting of the Lamps* (1996) was perhaps the most difficult musically that I presented in my recital, with changing metre and cross rhythms being a common feature of the piece.

\textsuperscript{39} “Season Brochure,” *Chamber Music New Zealand*, 2012.
\textsuperscript{40} “Season Brochure,” *Chamber Music New Zealand*, 2011.
\textsuperscript{41} Whitacre’s Hebrew Folk Songs are a prime example of this with five different arrangements. Whitacre, *Five Hebrew Love Songs*, Preface.
\textsuperscript{42} Hamilton, *At the Lighting of the Lamps*, introduction.
\textsuperscript{43} Thomson, *Oxford History of New Zealand Music*, 261.
EXAMPLE 5.1 Hamilton, *At the Lighting of the Lamps*, “V”, bars 1-10

David Hamilton never forgets that he is writing for the voice, although the music is technically demanding as in the opening of “V” [5.1]. The soprano begins in a declamatory *melisma* with large leaps around the *passagio*. The second line (bars 4-6) is in the style of a
**recitative** with the rhythm of the words being dominant. Again this passage moves through the *passagio* so the singer must carefully place the ‘E’ of “Almighty” high in the middle register to ensure a smooth transition through the *passagio* with *laryngeal tilt* allowing the top note to ring out with a free tone. The final phrase of the opening (bars 6-9) sits on the *passagio* demanding a strong technique from the singer. Music like this calls for meticulous technical and musical work from the singer.

A New Zealand art song that often appears in recital programmes is Anthony Ritchie’s simply titled *Song* that was originally written for a choir, but has found its home in the song repertoire. With a text by New Zealand poet James K. Baxter, *Song* has a beautiful melody with a sympathetic accompaniment that does not challenge the performer or listener harmonically allowing the text to become the focus. It is the musical qualities found in songs like this that enable a young singer to develop into an artist. As Hallmark says,

> A good song recitalist becomes the persona in the poem-song and engages each member of the audience in the shared lyrical experience of poet and composer...the singer bares her or his soul and draws the sympathetic beholder-listener into an aesthetic, psychological, and emotional experience evoked by the words and mediated by the music."\(^{44}\)

Art song recitals are not as popular in New Zealand as instrumental chamber music\(^ {45}\), and I suggest that this has something to do with our multicultural musical practices. In Germany and Britain, chamber music is an extension of their folk traditions, as I will discuss below. As New Zealanders, our inherited English folksong tradition was brought to us by settlers from the British Isles, but not everyone shares that musical inheritance. Instead, our shared singing traditions come in the form of Maori Songs and the iconic popular songs of the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, for most singers of my age who have sung in choirs, our shared singing tradition since the genesis of the NZYC has been the music of Douglas Mews, David Hamilton and Anthony Ritchie. These are “our” ensemble folk songs.

### The Folk Tradition

Folk music or the folk style was a major influence on the chamber music writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond. One only has to look at the songs of

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\(^{44}\) Hallmark, *German Lieder*, xii.

\(^{45}\) As is evident in chamber music programming. See pages 76-77.
Schubert, Brahms and Spohr to see that German Lieder has its origin in folk music. The Volkslied, with its strophic structure, as lieder scholar Harry E. Seelig states, is “…arguably the most important source of the nineteenth century art song.” Spohr, who has been described as “…the great master of Romantic instrumental music [and] the unjustly forgotten song composer…” whose music found its home in the “…comfortable domestic atmosphere of the middle class drawing room…” was certainly influenced by folk music. His *Sechs Deutsche Lieder, Op.103*, which is true art song, is certainly written in the folk idiom, with the clarinet part echoing the folk melodies of central Europe. In contrast the Scottish Folk Songs of Beethoven for Vocal Quartet and Piano trio were written at the request of George Thomson, a folk-song collector and publisher living in Edinburgh, who “…strove to save the folk melodies of his home country from falling into oblivion.” Beethoven began setting folk songs from the British Isles in 1809. The first sets were not as popular as previous settings by Haydn and Kozeluch and it was suggested by Thomson that Beethoven’s writing was too complex. Beethoven was “…angry at Thomson for his on-going request for simplicity [and said]…that he could hardly call the pieces his own.” Yet it was this “simplicity” that made these arrangements “…suitable for amateur performance…” in both Great Britain and Germany.

In Spohr’s *Sechs Deutsche Lieder* the vocal line echoes German folk melodies, the clarinet comments on the emotions within the singer and the outside world, and the piano gives the emotion stability and depth, supporting the lyricism of the voice and clarinet. In “Wiegenlied”[5.2] the fourth song of the cycle, the vocal line is a simple lullaby, and Spohr treats it as such with a gentle rocking pattern in the piano and a repetitive melodic line to send the baby to sleep. While Spohr treats the material simply, the three parts have separate identities. The piano does play the vocal line, but it also plays repeated semiquavers throughout the song, spelling out the harmonic progressions. The clarinet, at its most simple in this cycle, plays a counter-melody with the voice in the beginning (bars 13), imitating the rustle of the wind as the soprano sings, *Draußen säuselt nur der Wind* (Outside is but the rustle of the wind), ending with an echo of the vocal line.

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46 Seelig quoted in Hallmark, *German Lieder*, 1.
48 Ibid.
49 *Beethoven and Great Britain*: “Where your compositions are preferred to any other…”
50 Biamonte, *Modality in Beethoven’s Folk-Song*, 28
51 *Beethoven and Great Britain*: “Where your compositions are preferred to any other…”
52 Ibid.
EXAMPLE 5.2 Spohr, “Wiegenlied,” *Sechs Deutsche Lieder.*

*Wiegenlied*  
*(in drei Tönen)*  
*(Hoffmann von Fallersleben)*

1. Alles still in säuber Ruh,  
2. Schließ du deine Augenlein,  
3. Und die Blümlein schau ich an,  

1. Drum mein Kind, so schlauf auch du,  
2. laß sie wie zwei Krosspen sein.  
3. und die Auglein küß ich dann,  

1. Draußen säuelt nur der Wind, su, su,  
2. Morgens wenn die Sonne erblüht, sind sie  
3. und der Mutter Herz vergeben, daß es
Beethoven’s duet “Behold my love how green the groves” [5.3], while not a lullaby, has a similar rocking quality. It is a simple arrangement of the original Robbie Burns folk song, and like many of these folk settings by Beethoven, the modal harmonies from the original song have been classicised.\textsuperscript{54} The piano doubles the vocal lines and adds a simple harmony. The violin and cello pass a simplified version of the tune between them and are usually confined to playing in unison or thirds. The introduction and ending does not bring any

\textsuperscript{54} Biamonte, Modality in Beethoven’s Folk-Song, 62.
new musical ideas, just a repetition of the tune motif. The modest arrangement allows the text and the original tune to be the main focus, allowing the singers to be the dominant lines in the texture.

**EXAMPLE 5.3** Beethoven, “Behold my love how green the groves,” Number 9, *Scottish Folk Songs*, bars 1-19

**DUETTO.**

*Behold my Love how green the groves... Schau her, mein Lieb, der Wälder Grün.*

**No. 9.** Grazioso.

**Violino.**

**Violoncello.**

**Pianoforte.**

Cuarto Iº

Cuarto IIº

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In Britain folk tunes were “freely plundered” by composers. Dahlhaus writes that “It was not the lower classes, the originators of folk song, but rather the bourgeoisie, the searchers after their ‘noble simplicity,’ who rediscovered the folksong and restored their unearthed material to a ‘second life’ in nineteenth-century music culture.” However, folk music

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55 Potter, Vocal Authority, 71.
56 Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 110.
arrangements were popular in seventeenth-century aristocratic society,\textsuperscript{57} and in the eighteenth century, folk song arrangements by Haydn and Beethoven were a feature of musical evenings. By the eighteenth century the middle classes were able to buy publications of folk music. Many of these songs were sung in the “chamber” and in taverns and coffee houses,\textsuperscript{58} and it was here that catches and glees found a home. Eric Whitacre’s \textit{Hebrew Songs}, written to be “Troubadour Songs”\textsuperscript{59} are art songs, yet have their colour and rhythm firmly set in Hebrew folk music. The work highlights dance-like passages, folk gestures in the violin writing, and the soprano is even required to play the tambourine.

\textbf{EXAMPLE 5.4} Eric Whitacre, “Kalá kallá”, \textit{Five Hebrew Love Songs}, bars 65-76.

Example 5.4 removed for copyright reasons.

This musical example can be found on page 6 of Eric Whitacre’s “Five Hebrew Love Songs.”

While being an original composition, simple rhythmic chords of the violin, the energetic, free line of the voice, the addition of a tambourine and the cross rhythms gives “Kalá kallá” [5.4] a rustic, almost improvised quality. In contrast, the fourth song “Éyze shéleg” [5.5] is art song. The soprano, violin and piano interweave imitating the falling of snow. The piano begins on repeated notes, adding a bell-like motif in the right hand. These are \textit{Kmo}\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{57} Elliott et al, "Scotland," in \textit{Grove Music Online}.

\textsuperscript{58} Potter, \textit{Vocal Authority}, 71.

\textsuperscript{59} Whitacre, \textit{Five Hebrew Love Songs}, Intro.
chalomót ktanim No'lim mehashamá‘im (Like little dreams falling from the sky) mentioned in the poem. The soprano becomes another voice in the texture, with a soaring line, that initially outlines a C7 chord. The violin part is the only one with a motif that comes out of the texture and imitates the small snow flurries (bars 11-15) disturbing the otherwise still falling of snow.

**EXAMPLE 5.5** Eric Whitacre, “Éyze shéleg,” *Five Hebrew Love Songs*, bars 1-19

Example 5.5 removed for copyright reasons.

This musical example can be found on pages 8-9 of Eric Whitacre’s “Five Hebrew Love Songs.”

Example 5.5 removed for copyright reasons.
This musical example can be found on pages 8-9 of Eric Whitacre’s “Five Hebrew Love Songs.”

As Whitacre and his predecessors had done, “…composers and recasters of folk songs proceeded alike on the assumption that they were participating in tradition as documented by the folk song, which they saw as the literary and musical expression of the productive spirit of their nation.”

**Ensemble Singing**

Partsongs, glees and madrigals, whether in English, German or French, were originally written as chamber music but have now become the domain of the twenty-first-century choir. At a recent concert by the New Zealand Secondary Students’ Choir at the ‘Big Sing Finale’, the national choir competition for secondary school choirs, the audience heard *Je ne l’ose dire* by Pierre Certon sung effectively by a choir of 60. These pieces were written for one voice per part and were often sung as after dinner entertainment. Partsongs and

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glees\textsuperscript{61} were inspired by the English madrigal of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “[t]o a generation whose experience of partsong was largely limited to obscene catches, the flowing lines, sensuous textures and poetic seriousness of the Elizabethan and Jacobean madrigal came as a revelation and a challenge.”\textsuperscript{62} The glee, like the early madrigal, divided itself into sections highlighting the emotions of the text, semi-chorus passages where one or more voices drop out, and changes from duple to triple time and back again.\textsuperscript{63} These songs also had wide variations of dynamics and often obvious articulation to aid in telling the story.

Thomas Walmisley’s (1783-1866) partsong Music, all Powerful (c.1830), [5.6] displays instances of these semi-chorus passages (bars 21-32), dynamic word painting with a \textit{ff} on “fierce anger’s furious rage” (bars 18-20), followed by a \textit{subito piano} on “disarm”. Walmisley articulates the words “thrilling ecstasy” (bars 46-47) and “world’s harsh clangour” (bars 41-42) with strong accents. This may seem overdone to our ears, but for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ears, “…the musical language of the partsong typified its time…”\textsuperscript{64}

In nineteenth-century Germany the popularity of the partsong “…flourished largely as a manifestation of the upsurge in German national consciousness…”, \textsuperscript{65} and as in Britain, choral singing was becoming a popular social pastime. Mendelssohn’s partsong writing was surely influenced by hearing glees on his trips to Britain, and Schumann’s partsongs “…show many of the best features of his solo songs and chamber music in their lyricism and sense of inner propulsion.”\textsuperscript{66}

The ensemble pieces by Horsley, Walmisley, Pearsall, Goss, Sullivan and Schumann are all prime examples of vocal chamber music and require the singers to perform as soloists but within an ensemble, with each voice being equal. These songs show examples of homophonic and polyphonic writing, how the singer must take care with vowel blend, highlight the weaving textures where one part is more important than the other, and declaim the text in a way that is true to the music.

\textsuperscript{61} Johnson, “Glee”, New Grove, 942.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Blezzard, “Partsong,” New Grove, 177.
\textsuperscript{65} Blezzard, German Romantic Partsongs, iv.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., v.
There is an extraordinary wealth of German chamber music that has its place in the world of the soloist and the chorister and as Martha Elliott writes “[o]ver the course of the nineteenth century, the lied was thus transformed from a miniature form for private consumption to a large, expansive form for the public concert hall.” 67 My final recital *The Soloist as an Ensemble Singer* explored some of this repertoire. From the aforementioned partsongs of Schumann to the famous quartets of Brahms, each of these pieces

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67 Elliott, Martha, *Singing in Style*, 162.
demonstrates the soloist as a true ensemble singer. These works demand “…close communication between singer and accompanist…” and it is these pieces that emphasised the shift “…from music suitable for amateurs to music intended for social use.”

Brahm’s Zigeunerlieder, Opus 103 (1887), Liebeslieder-Walzer, Opus 52 (1868-9), and Quartette für Sopran, Alt, Tenor und Baß mit Pianoforte, Opus 92 (1889), are some of his best-known works for a quartet of soloists. They are often first introduced to singers as choral works rather than pieces for soloists. In my final recital I presented Zigeunerlieder however, in its second incarnation, as song cycle for voice and piano. This set of eleven songs was first written in 1887 for Vocal Quartet and piano, and in 1889 Brahms re-wrote eight of them for solo voice. Inspired by the playing of the Hungarian violinist Reményi, whom he toured with in 1853, these songs are written in a Hungarian style rather than being arrangements of Hungarian folk-songs. There is certainly a folk influence on the writing, and to echo the Hungarian language where the stress of the word is always on the first syllable and the vocal line of each song begins on the down beat.

The Liebeslieder-Walzer, arguably the centre-piece for vocal ensemble writing of the nineteenth century, was originally written for piano duet and vocal quartet, and first published in 1869. The second publication of 1875 describes the vocal parts as ad libitum, so they could effectively be performed without the voices, however, this was “… to Brahm’s regret…” In a letter to his publisher Simrock he wrote;

Under no circumstances may they be printed for the first time without the voice parts… let us hope they will become real Hausmusik and will soon be sung a lot.

Quartette für Sopran, Alt, Tenor und Baß mit Pianoforte, Opus 92, is a collection of four songs linked by the sophisticated writing of Brahms elevating the vocal ensemble from Hausmusik to the realm of serious music. Music journalist Wolfgang Teubner writes that Brahms was “…the only composer of the late nineteenth century who did not view the solo or choral vocal ensemble with piano accompaniment as a music by-product…His approach to ensemble lieder is a great deal more sophisticated than that of his predecessors…[and]

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68 Elliott, Singing in Style, 162.
69 Stark, Brahms’s Vocal Duets, 2.
70 Ibid., 31.
71 Brahms, quoted in Stark, Brahms’s Vocal Duets, 31.
he considerably raised the demands made on performers.” These quartets fell outside of the nineteenth-century domestic music-making realm and required trained performers. The four songs from this opus use the piano as another voice, rather than as an accompanying instrument. The complexity of the writing and intensity of each song allow the performer to express the emotions of the text in an exciting way.

The techniques of singing chamber music

In choral music the soprano often has the most difficult job, regularly having to consistently sing on thin fold so she does not dominate the texture; it is different in vocal chamber music. Ray Beegle, founder of the New York Vocal Arts Ensemble reveals that the major difficulties are for the alto voice.

The mezzo/contralto and baritone/bass will find themselves hovering lower for longer periods of time than they are accustomed to in the solo literature. The alto line is often the most difficult to hear in an ensemble so for good balance when the whole quartet is singing, you need a mezzo/contralto who can make a full sound in her lower register.

So we have had to make technical adjustments while singing, and pay attention to where we are standing so all voices are featured, rather than one dominating. When I am singing on or below the lower passagio I have to sing louder so that the alto has more sound to sing on so she is heard within the texture. In my final recital I took the role of the alto in a selection of Schumann’s part-songs. This is to not only highlight the variety of skills a singer needs in today’s ever-changing musical environment, but also to focus on the instrumental nature of the voice. If singers are able to negotiate the passagio with ease, they can play a different part in the ensemble, in the same way a violinist can play the first or second violin part in a string quartet.

Most well-known recitalists in the twenty-first century have had a stellar operatic career first; audiences generally do not want to hear unknown singers perform a recital. One of

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73 Sopranos sit on the top of the texture so are more noticeable and are the dominating colour for the ensemble. With much of the choral repertoire expecting the soprano to sing around the secondo passagio for a large part of the time, this can cause fatigue problems and the vocal tone is compromised.
74 Please see glossary.
75 Winchester and Dunlap, Vocal Chamber Music, xx-xxi.
76 Even famous singers have a hard time finding audiences, especially in New Zealand. Anne Sofie von Otter was a victim of this recently in New Zealand. The concert (November 16, 2011) was moved from the Auckland Town Hall to the Town Hall’s Concert Chamber. One can only assume embarrassingly that this was due to poor ticket sales. The move to the Concert Chamber, however, was wonderful for all of us there, as we were treated to a fine display of art song in a more intimate venue.
the few singers to have become prominent as a recitalist through his performances and recordings is the tenor Ian Bostridge, most notably in the Lieder of Schubert and Schumann lieder, and the Canticles of Benjamin Britten.\(^{77}\) He only became known as an opera singer after this success. Chamber music requires a different attitude to the realms of opera and oratorio, but not necessarily a different vocal technique. The voice or voices are part of the texture, in true collaborative style the singer is not the ‘star’. Soprano Barbara Bonney, a major proponent of vocal chamber music, describes in a rather “descriptive” way the music of Schubert and Mozart as being “…totally exposed… [as though one is] on a horse and never being allowed to canter.”\(^{78}\) The notion of vocal chamber music performance is not a new one in Britain, Europe and North America, but sadly the recital is not as popular in New Zealand as it was in the post-WWII years when “…chamber music societies sprang up around the country,”\(^ {79}\) and girls from St Mary’s College, Ponsonby,\(^ {80}\) were regularly heard performing on the Auckland radio station 1YA.\(^ {81}\)

Without the disguise of costume, the chamber singer is more exposed on stage, in a similar way an orchestral player can feel when playing chamber music. The singer is the vehicle for the emotion of the words, whereas the instrumentalists comment on the emotion of the thoughts. It is very easy for a singer to “…choreograph…feeling through constant head or body movement…”\(^ {82}\) rather than honestly allowing the story to unfold. As leading pedagogue Marvin Keenze says “There isn’t a moment of vibration that is not part of the total communication…We just don’t make sounds, we make them for a reason.”\(^ {83}\)

When performing with instrumentalists the chamber singer normally has a piano accompanying, but in Albert Roussel’s Deux poèmes de Ronsard, Op.26\(^ {84}\) the singer performs with flute alone. Roussel was influenced by Indian modality, chromaticism and bitonality.\(^ {85}\) Graham Johnson describes Roussel’s music as “…the quintessence of the mélodie at its most lean and understated…”\(^ {86}\) and Pierre Bernac wrote that Roussel’s melodies “…combine[d] great harmonic refinement with a marked diversity of


\(^{78}\) Matheopoulos, Diva: The New Generation, 15.

\(^{79}\) Simpson, Hallelujahs and History, 97.

\(^{80}\) Where Dame Kiri Te Kanawa went to school.

\(^{81}\) Lovell-Smith, The Enigma of Sister Mary Leo, 69.

\(^{82}\) Miller, On the Art of Singing, 104.

\(^{83}\) Blades-Zeller, A Spectrum of Voices, 154.

\(^{84}\) Featured in my fourth recital.


\(^{86}\) Johnson and Stokes, A French Song Companion, 437.
rhythms...” This is certainly evident in the following example [5.7], with duple time against triple time and modal harmonies. The singing voice is fundamentally a melodic instrument and when the singer does not have perfect pitch, relies heavily on the surrounding musical cues. While Roussel is good at giving these cues, the high tessitura and harmonic line often make it difficult to hear the notes. An example of this is “Rossignol, mon mignon” (bars 41-44) [5.7]. The flute is playing around an A♭ major chord moving towards an F major descending arpeggio. The B♭ sung in the soprano part in bar 43 has to be related to the A♭ in the previous bar rather than the F major descending arpeggio. The height and speed of the flute part make it difficult to lock onto the note.


Tuning is another problem for the chamber music singer. Moving between just intonation and equal temperament can prove to be a challenge. On a piano a G♯ and an A♭ are the same thing and unless singers have had the chance to work with instrumental groups or choral groups it is commonplace to hear a singer finding this difficult when singing with instruments. Singers with a strong choral background naturally adjust, rarely having to think about it.

87 Berac, French Song, 230.
The following table [Table 5.1] shows the differences between a just and an equal chromatic scale starting on C4, notice the sometimes large differences between the two tuning systems “[s]ince your ear can easily hear a difference of less than 1 Hz for sustained notes, differences of several Hz can be quite significant!”88

**Table 5.1** Frequencies of the notes (in Hz) for C Major, starting on middle C (C4), for just and equal temperament.

(Reprinted data from “Scales: Just vs Equal Temperament (and related topics)”, *Physics of Music – Notes*, Bryan H. Suits.) 89

Table 5.1 has been removed for copyright reasons. It can be found at http://www.phy.mtu.edu/~suits/scales.html.

For the singer of the twenty-first century the amateur nature of vocal chamber music has faded and high levels of vocal technique and musicianship are required. When Ray Beegle looks for singers for chamber music, he wants excellent sightreaders who are able to make changes musically and emotionally. He laments that “[i]t is amazing how many wonderful

88 Suits, “Scales: Just vs Equal Temperament.”
89 Ibid.
musicians are not coachable. To my mind, this immediately disqualifies a singer, no matter how beautiful the voice.” When Barbara Winchester auditions her students in the vocal chamber music programme at the New England Conservatory she first will test their sightreading ability and then she will “…sing the other part [of a duet] with them which tells me a lot about their ensemble skills and whether they can hold their own part.” It is often in choral music that singers learn these skills. They are constantly being asked to adjust their tone colour, vowel shape, and dynamics all in a short space of time. Winchester also champions the “too many sopranos” problem by getting them to sing second soprano (and I would hazard a guess alto), to ensure a balance in the group but also to strengthen their musicianship. A study I performed at the University of Auckland focussed on the musicianship skills of voice students. While the cohort was too small to be conclusive, it was apparent that the sightreading ability of singers with a strong choral background was far greater than those students who had only a solo or even instrumental background. Sightreading needs to be practiced, and the choral and ensemble area is the perfect venue for this.

Voice students on the whole want to sing opera and not song. This is a universal problem and one that can only be solved if young singers are introduced to the world of song and ensemble singing with enthusiasm. Opera is seen as glamorous and the pinnacle of success, whereas the art of the recitalist is relegated to a cold church on a Sunday afternoon. Chamber music requires the singer to be sensitive to each part, learn to perform as part of a team (for a singer this is tricky, as in opera and oratorio training, they are learning to take the lead), and are entrusted with conveying the words of our great poets. The vocal chamber music repertoire is an often untapped resource by young singers, in spite of its obvious importance in developing their musicianship. Chamber music is the place to learn to be an ensemble musician while still taking on the role of the soloist.

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90 Winchester and Dunlap, *Vocal Chamber Music*, xx-xxi.
91 Ibid.
92 See Appendix 1, page 102.
93 See quote from Rufus Hallmark, page 4.
Conclusion

“For most singers pursuing a solo career, the choral ensemble will be a realistic part of their musical path in one way or another.”¹ As shown in this study, a soloist is never just a soloist. So much of the life of a soloist is spent in the world of the ensemble that singers and teachers need to be open to the many ways of learning these skills. For a singer from New Zealand, where for many their fundamental vocal training is in choirs, this is essential. There are always going to be young singers whose vocal colour and developing technique is not going to lend itself naturally to choral singing, but by giving them the vocal and technical tools to even try, is giving them a wealth of experience that they would not find in the practice room by themselves.

The signature pedagogy of instrumental performance includes chamber music and orchestral skills alongside their solo skills, “…creating a circular process of performance study”² from the studio, to the ensemble and back again. This needs to be reinforced in the teaching of a singer wanting to enter the profession. It gives them more professional options. A good musician is always going to be a good musician, and in my experience and across the literature, it is clear that choral training certainly helps the singer. The advantage that chorally trained singers have is that they are more readily capable of dealing with the contingent demand of repertoire and performance. They are familiar with a variety of styles, languages, and genres, jumping between these within a performance. Grammy Award-winning New Zealand bass-baritone Jonathan Lemalu said of his time in the New Zealand Youth Choir: “The choir for me has been very beneficial, not only for my musical and theoretical skills, but also my ability to listen...”³ For the singer training in the New Zealand environment there is not the amount of music to be heard and performed in comparison to a singer studying in the UK or Europe. Ensemble singing should be a fundamental part of the New Zealand singer’s vocal training.

As a student I could be asked to sing something at short notice, and those who are asked to do such things, usually have high level choral or ensemble background. The ensemble experience allows singers to be confident when the unexpected occurs in performance, because in choir they get the experience of singing in a myriad of different languages, styles, ensemble groupings, and with different conductors. For instance, a student solo singer would never get to sing with a large-scale symphony orchestra in their first year of

¹ Olson, Solo Singer, xvii.
³ Tipping, Choir of the World, 191.
study, but as the member of a choral group they can. It is within choral performance that a singer can learn how to sing Bach, Mozart, or even Tippett without having to learn an aria that is beyond them in years. Leading conductor Stephen Layton believes that it is a student’s “birthright” to sing Bach’s *B minor Mass*.

There are ramifications from a pedagogical perspective. Teachers are preparing young singers for a life in the musical profession, and for every singer this means something different. As pedagogues we need to give students a framework that encompasses solo, ensemble and choral skills and places equal value on them. We are not only extending their repertoire choices and musical skills, but also their employment options. Through careful planning and choosing of repertoire I was able to display the skills required for a soprano soloist in New Zealand in the twenty-first century. As I have demonstrated through my recitals, there is constant interplay between the solo and ensemble world and in much of this music there is no clear delineation between the two. Music that was written for solo voice was also conceived for solo ensemble, small chamber ensemble and choir. The problems associated with the soloistic voice in an ensemble or choir, namely vibrato and blend, will always be there as every conductor has a different sound ideal, but as is evident in my research, there are ways to overcome this. Placement of singers and giving singers the freedom to change vocal parts allows the desired colour to be achieved without impacting technically on the singer.

Further research needs to look at the career pathways of young singers in New Zealand over the course of ten years from graduation. Their musical background and the impact of choral and ensemble training on their solo careers need to be researched. Where have the top singers come from? Do they have a strong choral background or is it the instrumental background that has made them the singers they are today? A large number of New Zealand singers working on the international stage today have come through the New Zealand Youth Choir and this is no accident.

The notion of the professional soloist who wants to sing in ensembles and choirs as being a failed soloist is beginning to wane and this is something that needs to be addressed and acknowledged by universities, employers and audiences alike. Music conservatoires like the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, through *The Reflective Conservatoire*, are addressing the changing face of music education and exploring ways to “…develop

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4 Henderson, “Chorus of approval.”
5 See Appendix 4, page 125.
performers who can operate in a wide range of modes and … a wide range of careers.”

Singing teachers also need to acknowledge the role of choral and ensemble singing in the potential future of their students, and choral conductors need to be aware of the limitations and problems the developing voice can face in the choral world so as to find a way for young singers to participate without working against studio advice. As Dr. Timothy Salter, director of choral activities at the University of Iowa, says, “I want to work with the studio, not against it…” This exegesis concludes that this is most certainly the case for the future of singers in New Zealand.

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6 Ife, The Reflective Conservatoire, 5.
7 Olson, Solo Singer, 177.
Appendix

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sing professionally as a soloist at a national or international level. 125
Appendix 1  
Study

What factors promote a higher level of musicianship in student singers?

Throughout my singing and teaching career I have noticed that singers are often accused of not having strong musicianship skills when it is often singers who achieve well in aural and music theory study at university. My study aims to see what factors promote strong musicianship among singers aged 18-25 who are studying singing at the University of Auckland. Is it a strong choral background (eg. those who have sung in the NZ Secondary Student’s Choir, the National Youth Choir, or a top-level school choir), instrumental study, music theory study, or formal music study as part of a school programme that leads to higher musicianship levels?

My study was designed to test the musicianship levels of student singers at the University of Auckland aged 18-25 and examine whether the singer has sung as a chorister at a high level or if they have a strong instrumental or music theory background. I anticipate that the results of my study will demonstrate that a choral background, instrumental and theoretical background, or combination of these is advantageous for a singer wishing to study at university level and looking to a career in the singing profession. I also want to see if my results can be incorporated into the vocal curriculum.

Each participant was asked to fill in a questionnaire that outlines their own musical and choral background, and their views regarding whether choral training should be an integral part of their vocal training. They were also asked about participant’s views on musicianship training and whether they see this as important to their studies. The participants then took a short musicianship test (theory and aural) and the results, combined with the questionnaire results, would help me ascertain if there is a correlation between a strong choral background and good musicianship skills, or whether other factors promote this.

The testing was administered by a third party so I could not identify the participants. All data is displayed in such a way as to ensure anonymity.

Only eight participants were willing to take part in this study, so these findings can only been seen as indicative of what a larger study may reveal.

This study was approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee - Reference Number 8427.
Questionnaire Results

1. Did you study music at school?
   - All participants studied music at school using the NCEA curriculum

2. Did your school music programme include an aural skills component?
   - Yes – 6
   - No – 2
   *So this means that 2 participants came to university without having learnt aural skills as part of their school music programme. Further investigation needs to be done, I believe, on a national level, as to why some schools are opting out of this part of the NCEA music curriculum, when it is essential to have this if they go on to tertiary study.*

3. At what age did you start music lessons and what instrument/voice did you start on?
   - Piano 5
   - Violin 5
   - Keyboard 7
   - Recorder, piano 8
   - Violin 8, Voice 8
   - Piano 11
   - Voice 15
   - Voice 16
   *There is a fairly even spread here of instruments and ages for the first formal study of a musical instrument/voice. Two participants did not start until well into their teenage years, and voice was what they began their musical training on.*

4. Was classical music encouraged at home, either by listening to it or playing it?
   - Yes - 5
   - No – 3

5. Do you currently sing in a choir?
   - Yes - 5
   - No – 3

6. Do you currently sing in an opera chorus?
   - Yes - 1
   - No - 7
   *As all the participants were undergraduates, this could be seen as a fair representation of a larger group.*
7. What choirs do you sing/have you sung in?
   - Top school choir – one that made it to the Big Sing Finale - 4
   - Community Choir - 2
   - Church Choir - 1
   - Cathedral Choir - 1
   - Choral Society - 1
   - University Choir - 6
   - Chamber Choir/Ensemble - 4
   - NZ Secondary Students’ Choir/NZ Youth Choir/Voices NZ Chamber Choir - 4
   - International children’s choir – 1
   
   *All participants have sung in at least one choir.*

8. If you do not sing in a choir, what are your reasons?
   - Wanted to focus on other things
   - Lots of work, not much solo spotlight
   
   *Interesting that the solo spotlight was an issue, when many of the participants had never sung solo as a professional, and for many singers, a solo in a choral group is one of their first solo experiences.*

9. Have you sung as a professional soloist? (Recital/Oratorio/Opera or large scale event. NOT as a soloist within a choir)
   - Yes - 3
   - No - 5
   
   *As all the participants were undergraduates, again this could be seen as a fair representation of a larger group.*

10. Have any of your singing teachers ever dissuaded you from singing in a choir?
    - Yes - 2
    - No – 6

11. If yes, what was the reason?
    - Different way of singing, less line
    - My technique was not strong enough to fight old habits that were acceptable in choral singing
    
    *There is a perception that choral singing is different from solo singing. In discussion with Isabel Cunningham, and in my own experience, there is one technique.*

12. Have any of your singing teachers ever suggested that you should sing in a choir?
    - Yes - 7
    - No - 1
13. If yes, what was the reason?
   - Improve ear
   - Strengthen musicality
   - Improve vocal technique
   - Gain ensemble experience
   - Gain ensemble & aural skills
   - Sing in parts, listening to other parts, improving musicianship
   - Improve sight singing skills

   *Choral singing was seen by the participants as a great place to gain musicianship and ensemble skills*

14. Have you ever joined a choir or been advised to join a choir to improve your musicianship?
   - Yes - 8
   - No - 0

15. Has singing in a choir improved your vocal technique?
   - Yes - 6
   - No - 2

16. If yes, what techniques improved?
   - Strength, raised palate, loose jaw
   - All! Breathing, diction, understanding of vocal mechanism and in particular posture
   - Breath control and blending
   - Not listening to myself
   - Better vocal control - dynamic contrasts
   - Reducing the fear of high notes

   *A wide range of technical issues improved.*

17. Has singing in a choir caused any vocal problems?
   - Yes - 4
   - No - 4

18. What did you do to overcome this?
   - Not overuse the voice
   - Stop pushing
   - I had to adapt to mentally separating vocal techniques applicable in a solo sense vs. ones used in a choral sense
   - Was singing off voice in attempt to blend, so moved from the 1sts to 2nds

   *The majority of technical issues were to do with blend and fatigue, problems that are often raised by singing teachers.*
19. Have you ever stopped singing in a choir as it was hindering your vocal technique?
   - Yes - 0
   - No – 8

20. If yes, what were the problems?
   - N/A

21. Do you play/have you played any music instruments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Beginner</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organ/Keyboard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drums</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One participant had advanced skills in two instrumental disciplines, and every participant had some form of piano skills.*

22. Have you played in an orchestra or large instrumental ensemble?
   - Yes - 3
   - No - 5

23. What type of orchestra?
   - School - 3

*No other orchestras or large instrumental ensembles were indicated by the participants.*

24. If you have sat a theory exam (e.g. ABRSM, Trinity Guildhall), what was the highest grade you passed?
   - Grade 5 – 3
   - Grade 6 – 1
   - Grade 8 – 1

*One other participant did not complete the question, saying that they had sat a theory exam, but did not give the grade. Therefore six participants had sat a theory exam.*

25. If you sat a singing or instrumental exam (e.g. ABRSM, Trinity Guildhall), did you do well in the aural section?
   - Yes - 1
   - Moderately - 5
   - No - 0

*Two participants had not sat a practical graded exam*
26. If you sat a singing or instrumental exam (e.g. ABRSM, Trinity Guildhall), did you do well in the sight-reading section?
   - Yes - 0
   - Moderately - 6
   - No – 0
   
   *Two participants had not sat a practical graded exam*

27. Do you think that good musicianship is important to succeeding as a singer, whether as a soloist or chorister?
   - Yes - 7
   - No - 0
   - Maybe - 1
   
   *I was surprised that even one participant answered maybe to this question.*

28. If you have had problems with musicianship, have you taken the time to do extra study?
   - Yes - 7
   - No - 0
   - Not applicable - 1
   
   *One participant felt that their musicianship skills were of a level that they did not need to do extra study.*

29. Do you spend time improving your musicianship and sight-singing skills?
   - Yes - 8
   - No - 0

30. Any other comments you may feel are relevant.
   - As a chorister, although I do not consider myself to be more than relatively competent at sight-reading, I am constantly surprised at the difference in competence between choristers and those who have focused on solo singing, who often struggle, especially when they have to sing in an ensemble. In my experience, the very best musicians in terms of musicianship are singers who have sung in cathedrals.

   *Interesting that at university level there is the perception amongst voice students, that those who sing in choirs are better musicians, and yet many singers choose not to use choral singing as a vehicle to improve their musical skills. Though, as the musicianship test showed at an initial level, it is perhaps not musicianship skills as a whole that choristers are more proficient at, but rather practical aural (not academic) and sight-singing skills.*
Musicianship Test

Part A

1. Name these Intervals.

   Perfect 5\(^{th}\)  Perfect 4\(^{th}\)  minor 9\(^{th}\)  Augmented 4\(^{th}\)  Major 6\(^{th}\)

   Major 2nd  Diminished 3\(^{rd}\)  Major 6\(^{th}\)  Major 3\(^{rd}\)  minor 6th

2. Name these key signatures, both major and minor.

   C Major  Ab Major  A Major  Eb major  G Major
   A minor  F minor  F# minor  C minor  E minor

3. Write a g minor melodic scale ascending and descending in crotchets. Please write in the accidentals.

4. Write an A major scale descending in crotchets.

5. Write an F# minor scale ascending in minims.

6. Transpose this phrase up a Perfect 4\(^{th}\).
7. Write the four following cadences in the selected keys.

C major – Perfect
D major – Plagal
Eb major – Interrupted
D minor – Imperfect

Part A [Table A1] was one of the best answered sections, with three participants receiving full marks; however Participant 3 had problems with most of the section.

Table A.1 Musicianship Test Part A Results

![Bar chart showing results for Participants 1 to 8 for Questions 1 to 7 with percentages for Q1 to Q7]
Part B

1 Name these intervals – they will be played twice harmonically.

1- minor 3rd 2 - comp. m3 or 3 – major 2nd 4 – major 6th 5 – 8th or octave minor 10th

6 – major 9th or 7 – perfect 5th 8 – major 6th 9 – minor 2nd 10 – major 3rd compound major 2nd

2 Melodic dictation
Write down these two tunes. The first note, keychord and rhythm will be given. They will be played 4 times.

A

B

3 Name these cadences – you may use the musical term (eg: Imperfect) or Roman Numerals.

4 Name these choral progressions in Roman Numerals or musical terms (*eg.* dominant), noting any inversions.

The key chord will be named and played and the progression will be played twice.

1. E major  
   Ic      V
2. G major  
   vi      IV     I
3. C minor  
   ic      V7     VI

**Part B [A.2] had challenging moments for all the participants.** I was especially surprised to see how difficult Question 1 was, considering identifying intervals is a rudimentary skill in musicianship. Question 2a was answered correctly by all bar one, while the more difficult 2b proved to be a challenge for some. Question 3 was more challenging than I expected as these are three basic cadences, while Question 4 again proved to be challenging.

**Table A.2 Musicianship Test Part B Results**
Part C

1. A series of notes will be played, please sing back the requested note at any octave. There will be 6 examples and they will be played twice before you answer. You will not get a second attempt.

   ![Musical Notation]

   A - Sing this note   B – Top   C - Bottom   D – Middle   E – Bottom   F – Second from bottom

2. Sightsing this short tune to ‘la’. You will be given the key chord, starting note and pulse. You will have 20 seconds to look at it and be given two attempts. You may read it in either Treble or Bass Clef.

   **Treble**

   ![Musical Notation]

   **Bass**

   ![Musical Notation]

3. Sightsing a portion of these two Bach Chorales to ‘la’.

   Altos and Tenors, please sing your written part.
   Sopranos, please sing the tenor part up an octave.
   Basses, please sing the alto part down an octave.
   The parts you are not singing will be played.

   You will be given the key chord, pulse, and your starting note.
   You will have 30 seconds to look at it and be given two attempts.
Chorale 1

Aus meines Herzens Grunde

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)
Results in Part C [Table A.3] were mixed. Sightsinging is an important skill for singers, and it was interesting that for some, this was difficult and perhaps a skill they do not work enough on. Question 1 of Part C is a common test for choral auditions, and this was relatively well answered, with no one getting below 50%. On the whole the first accompanied sightsinging test was the best attempted, with the modulation in the
unaccompanied example catching many participants out. Question 3b was difficult for a number of the participants.

Table A.3 Musicianship Test Part C Results

I then looked at the results, focusing on those participants who sang or had sung in a national choir (NCM), versus those who had an advanced level of instrumental skills (AIS). I was not able to draw any firm conclusions. [Tables A.4 and A.5]

Table A.4 Musicianship Test Part A AIS vs NCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced Instrumental Skills</th>
<th>National Choir Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Participant 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I was not able to draw any firm conclusions.
In Part A (Table A.4) I saw the strongest and weakest answers coming from the National Choir Members (NCM) and in the Advanced Instrumental Skills (AIS) group and range from excellent to average.

**Table A.5 Musicianship Test Part B AIS vs NCM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced Instrumental Skills</th>
<th>National Choir Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2b</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Part B (Table A.5) again saw a wide range of results over the two groups.

**Table A.6 Musicianship Test Part C AIS vs NCM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced Instrumental Skills</th>
<th>National Choir Members</th>
</tr>
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<thead>
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Part C (Table A.6) was the only section where any conclusions could be drawn. The National Choir Members were better in the aural and sightsinging skills, with the strongest participant in AIS also being part of the NCM group.
Conclusions

Unfortunately this study did not have enough participants to draw any conclusive results. However the sung elements were definitely performed better by those who sing or sang in a national choir. This would make sense as they are regularly expected to sight-sing music at a high level and this confirms my own experience in teaching: those who sing chorally at a high level, are on the whole able to read and learn music at a faster rate compared to those who do not.

In the future I would like to do this study again with a larger group over different instrumental and vocal disciplines to see if learning a particular instrument or having choral experience gives a musician a particular advantage in musicianship.
Appendix 2     Recital Programmes

Recital One - Songs of These Islands

Morag Atchison – Soprano
Dean Sky-Lucas – Piano
Susan Bierre – Viola

_from_ The Sun, the Wind and the Rain

_Dorothy Freed_ (1919-2000)

Kowhai
Change
Sunflowers
Wish

Three Songs

_Douglas Lilburn_ (1915-2001)

Clear Sky
The Picnic
Summer Afternoon

Two Songs

_Anthony Ritchie_ (b.1960)

Song
He Moemoea

At the Lighting of the Lamps

_David Hamilton_ (b.1955)

I, II, III, IV, V, VI

Children and Adults

_Anthony Ritchie_ (b.1960)

Children
To Ben at the Lake
Zoom
Just like that

Five Campbell Songs

_Craig Utting_ (b.1965)

Images
Viola
Monument
Haiku
The Gunfighter
Recital Two - The Operatic Heroine

Morag Atchison – soprano
David Kelly – piano
Emma Sloman – soprano
Philip Griffin – tenor
Jonathan Palmer – baritone

The Strength of Young Women and the Awakening of Love
Cosi fan tutte, 1790
W.A. Mozart (1756-91)
A guarda sorella, Act 1, scene 4
Soave sia il vento, Act 1, scene 10
Come scoglio, Act 1, scene 14

The Rake’s Progress, 1951
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
No word from Tom, Act 1, scene 3

Louise, 1900
Gustave Charpentier (1860-1956)
Depuis le jour, Act 3, scene 1

La Bohème, 1896
Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)
Si. Mi chiamano Mimi, Act 1
O soave fanciulla, Act 1

Tormented Queens
Dido and Aeneas, 1689 or earlier
Henry Purcell (1659?-1695)
When I am laid in earth, Act 3

Giulio Cesare, 1724
G. F. Handel (1685-1759)
Non disperar, Act 1, scene 5

Maria Stuarda, 1835
Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)
Guarda, su’ prati appare, Act 2, Scene 1

Mysticism and Duty
Die Zauberflöte, 1791
W.A. Mozart (1756-91)
Ach ich fühl’s, Act 2, scene 17

The Midsummer Marriage, 1955
Michael Tippett (1905-1988)
Is it so strange? Act 1, scene 8

Tannhäuser, 1845
Richard Wagner (1813-1883)
Dich, teure Halle, Act 2, scene 1
Recital Three – Concertist or Ripienist? The soloist’s role in Oratorio

Morag Atchison – Soprano
James Tibbles – Organ
Dean Sky-Lucas – Piano
Kate Spence – Mezzo

Sally Tibbles – Flute
Ella Tunnicliffe-Glass – Flute
Alison Dunlop – Oboe/Cor anglais
Alison Jepson – Oboe/Cor anglais
Miranda Hutton – Violin
Fiona Haughton – Violin
Wen-Chuan Lin – Viola
Margaret Cooke – Cello
Darija Andzakovic – Double Bass

Rachel Sutherland – Soprano
Erin Atchison – Soprano
Helen Acheson – Alto
Sheridan Williams – Alto
Jeffrey Chang – Tenor
Brent Read – Tenor
Arie Hoeflak – Tenor
Rowan Johnston – Bass
Anthony Schneider – Bass

Christ is Condemned
Matthäus-Passion, BWV 244, 1727  
J.S.Bach  (1685-1750)

46. Chorale: Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe! (Chor)
47. Evangelist, Pilate: Der Landpfleger sagte. (TB)
48. Recitativo: Er hat uns allen wohlgetan. (S)
49. Aria: Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben. (S)
50a. Evangelist: Sie schrien aber noch mehr und sprachen. (T)
50b. Coro I & II: Laß ihn kreuzigen! (Chor)
50c. Evangelist, Pilate: Da aber Pilatus sahe, daß er nichts schaffete. (TB)
50d. Coro I & II: Sein Blut komme über uns und unsre Kinder. (Chor)
50e. Evangelist: Da gab er ihnen Barrabam los. (T)

Mary Weeps at the Cross
Stabat Mater, 1735/6  
G.B. Pergolesi  (1710-1736)

1. Duet: Stabat Mater (SA)
2. Aria: Cujus animam (S)
3. Duet: O quam tristis (SA)

Solomon’s Judgement
Solomon, HWV 67, 1748  
G.F. Handel  (1685-1759)

28. Recit: My Sov’reign Liege (SAT)
29. Trio: Words are weak to paint my fear (SSA)

The Gift of Redemption
Requiem in D minor, K.626, 1791  
W.A.Mozart  (1756-91)

III, No.4. Quartet: Recordare (SATB)
The Lord will Comfort You
Elijah, 1846
21. Aria: Hear Ye, Israel (S)
28. Terzetto: Lift thine eyes (SSA)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)

The Promise of Heaven
Petite Messe Solennelle, 1863
13. Aria: O salutaris

G. Rossini (1792-1868)

Lord have Mercy
Berliner Messe, 1990
1. Kyrie (SATB)
2. Gloria (SATB)

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

A Mother Weeps
A Child of Our Time, 1939-41
7. Aria: How can I cherish my man? (S)
8. Spiritual: Steal Away (S T & Choir)

Michael Tippett (1905-98)
Recital Four - The Intimate Voice

Morag Atchison – Soprano
Dean Sky-Lucas – Piano
Luca Manghi – Flute
Donald Nicholls – Clarinet
Mark Bennett – Violin
Helen Acheson – Alto
Lachlan Craig – Tenor
Rowan Johnston – Bass

Five Hebrew Love Songs (2001)  
Eric Whitacre (b.1970)
Soprano, Violin, Piano
1 Temuná
2 Kalá kallá
3 Lárov
4 Éyze shéleg!
5 Rakút
Poems by Hila Plitmann

Sechs deutsche Lieder, Op.103 (1837)  
Louis Spohr (1784-1859)
Soprano, Clarinet, Piano
1 Sei still mein Herz (Schweitzer, Carl B.v.)
2 Zwiegesang; (Reinick, R.)
3 Sehnsucht; (Geibel, Em.)
4 Wiegenlied in drei Tönen (Hoffmann von Fallersleben)
5 Das heimliche Lied (Koch, E.)
6 Wach auf (Kuleman, R)

Deux poèmes de Ronsard, Op.26 (1924)  
Albert Roussel (1869-1937)
Soprano, Flute
1 Rossignol mon mignon
2 Ciel, aer, et vens

Soir Païen (Samain)  
Philippe Gaubert (1879-1941)
Soprano, Flute, Piano

English Romantic Partsongs
William Horsley (1774-1858)
Music, all powerful (c1830)  
Thomas F. Walmisley (1783-1866)
Slow fresh fount (1811)  
Robert Pearsall (1795-1856)
Who shall have my lady fair? (published 1869)  
John Goss (1800-1880)
List! for the breeze (published 1902)  
Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)
The long day closes (1868)
Recital 5 – The Soloist as an Ensemble Singer: Lieder that is equally at home in the repertoire of the soloist and the ensemble.

Morag Atchison – Soprano
Dean Sky-Lucas – Piano
and Guests

Zigeunerlieder, Opus 103 (1887)  
Soprano and Piano

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Liebeslieder-Walzer, Opus 52 (1868-9)

Vocal Quartet and Piano Duet

Quartette für Sopran, Alt, Tenor und Baß mit Pianoforte, Opus 92 (1889)

Vocal Quartet and Piano

Schottische Lieder, Op.108 (1815-18)

Vocal Ensemble and Piano Trio

1. Music, love, and wine
6. Dim, dim is my eye
9. Behold my love how green the groves
11. Oh! thou the lad of my heart
19. O swiftly glides the bonny boat
20. Faithfu’ Johnnie
22. The Highland Watch

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Partsongs

Vocal Quartet

Robert Schumann (1810-56)

Jägerlied, Op.59 no.3 (1846)
Ungewitter Op.67 no.4 (1849)
John Anderson, Op.67 no.5 (1849)
Der Rekrut, Op.75 no.4 (1849)
Sommerlied, Op.146 no.4 (1849)
Appendix 3  **Winners of the Mobil Song Quest (1956-2002) and Lexus Song Quest (2005-2012)**

The Lexus Song Quest (formerly the Mobil Song Quest) is New Zealand’s premier classical singing competition, with many singers going on to celebrated operatic careers. A number of these singers have also sung with the NZYC. With the change of conductor of the NZYC in 1989 to Karen Grylls, singers with solo potential were now becoming a feature in the choir and this can be seen in the list of winners in the Mobil/Lexus Song Quest (marked in italics) from the 1990s onwards. The vocal colour of the choir was changing from the traditional English colour of the original choir to a colour world influenced by the sounds of Scandinavia and the USA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Winner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Donald Jack</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Paul Gilmore</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Mary O’Brien</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>Patricia Price</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Malvina Major</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>Kiri Te Kanawa</td>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>Anne Rasmussen</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>Patricia House</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Christopher Doig</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Christopher Lackner</td>
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<td>Lyle Kennaway</td>
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<td>Malcolm Smith</td>
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<td>1981</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>David Griffiths</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>Robyn Lynch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Deirdre Elliot</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Tracey King</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Teddy Tahu Rhodes</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>Martin Snell</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Andrea Creighton</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Jonathan Lemalu</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Jared Holt</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Anna Leese</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Madeleine Pierard</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Phillip Rhodes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Aivale Cole</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Amitai Pati</td>
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1. *NZ International Festival of the Arts, “Lexus Song Quest, History.”*
Appendix 4  Members of the New Zealand Youth Choir who have gone on to sing professionally as a soloist at a national or international level.

Helen Acheson  
Rachel Alexander  
Lauren Armishaw  
Tom Atkins  
John Beaglehole  
Amelia Berry  
Peter de Blois  
Jack Bourke  
Chris Bowen  
Tania Brand  
Chris Bruerton  
Ian Campbell  
Carmel Carroll  
Sarah Castle  
Stephen Chambers  
Victoria Chammanee  
Annabelle Cheetham  
Simon Christie  
Stuart Coats  
Sarah Court  
Lachlan Craig  
Stephen Diaz  
Nicola Edgecombe  
Georgina Jamieson Emms  
Joseph Gardner  
James Harrison  
Zane Jarvis  
Rowan Johnston  
Matthew Landreth  
Anna Leese  
Matthew Leese  
Jonathan Fa'a'fetiai Lemalu  
Kate Lineham  
Kent McIntosh  
Moses MacKay  
Nicholas Madden  
Ben Makisi  
Hamish Morrison  
Laurence Mossman  
John Murray  
Jonathan Palmer  
Simon O'Neill  
Amitai Pati  
Pene Pati  
Anna Pierard  
Madeleine Pierard  
Teddy Tahu Rhodes  
John Rosser  
Rebecca Ryan  
Oliver Sewell  
Martin Snell  
Jayne Tankersley  
Wendy Dawn Thompson  
Maria Treadaway  
Robert Tucker  
Jonathon Waetford  
Richard Weston  
Paul Whelan  
Robert Wiremu  
Jenny Wolleman

Apologies if I have left anyone off this list

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