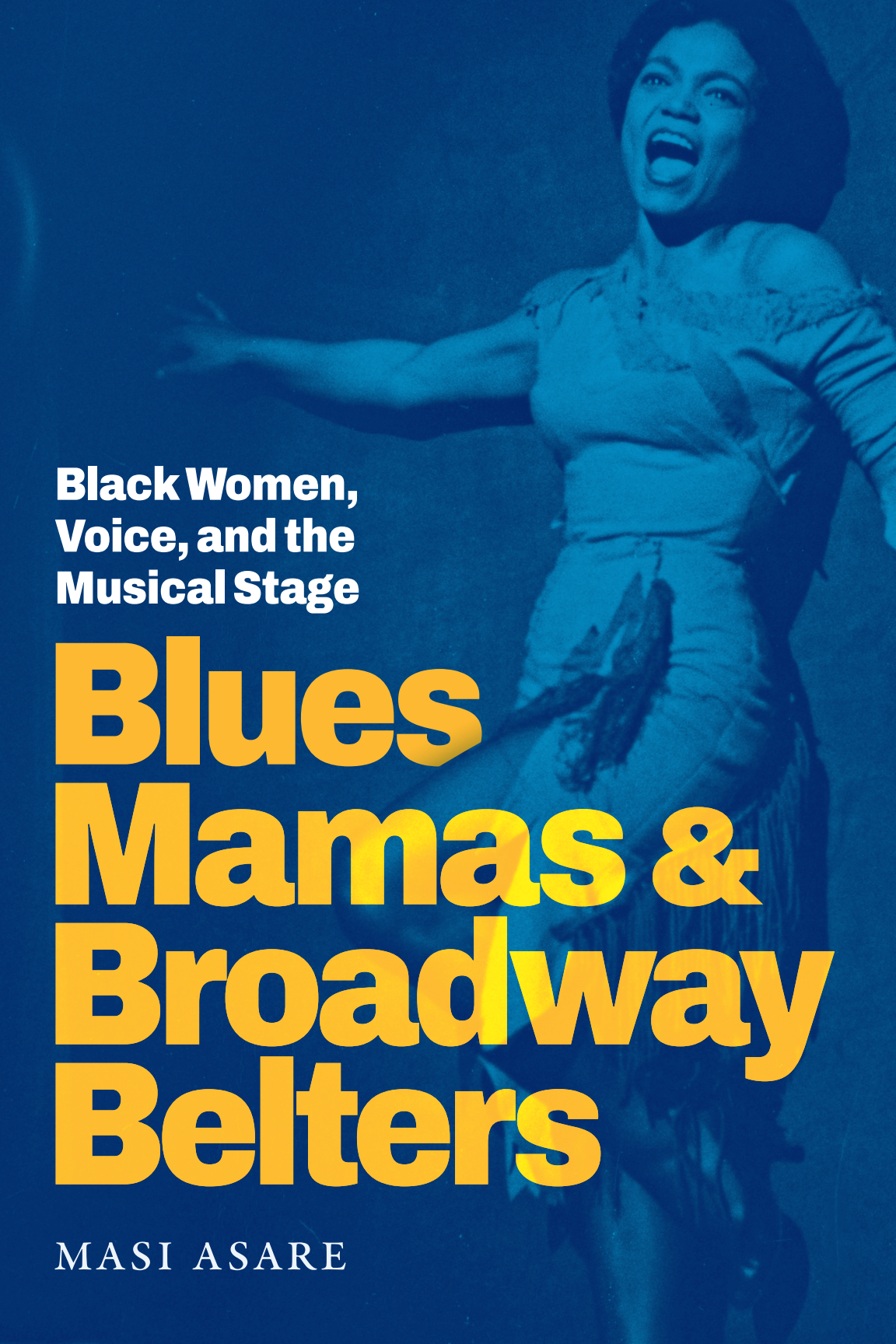

Black Women, Voice, and the Musical Stage

Blues Mamas & Broadway Belters

MASI ASARE

Blues Mamas & Broadway Belters

Refiguring American Music

A SERIES EDITED BY

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FOR MY FAMILY

Contents

Warming Up

This section is not literally about warming up your voice. But it is a warm-up to the ideas in the pages that follow.

When I began writing this book, I was living in New York, working a day job, writing musicals and coaching voice whenever I could find the time. Now, as I finalize this manuscript, I commute between New York and Chicago, and work full-time as an artist, scholar, and teacher of musical theatre history, vocal performance studies, and musical theatre writing/composing. I think of my life as a flower that carries multiple blooms on a single stem. Sometimes the voice teaching, the theatrical songwriting, and the scholarly research appear to some people to be different undertakings, separate efforts. But for me they are all part of the same work, born of the same root. As a black woman and a mixed-race person living in the United States, holding multiple and simultaneous identities is simply part of the shape of my life.

The ideas I write about here are not purely theoretical; they are what I live with daily as an artist and practitioner. In my performance classes, students learn song repertoire by ear by singing along with the artists on recordings or in the room. I am also lucky enough to hear incredible singers rehearse and perform new musicals that I work on as a songwriter and dramatist. Some of these have scores where the full sense of the music really *can't* be written on the page, it can only be taught and learned through singing along with the voice of the composer or the music director. Often, that is also how my collaborators and I wrote it, voice to voice. Sometimes, learning the vocal music requires letting go of performers' prior experience of "training"—the music asks for less vibrato, different diction, adjusted tone colors. I witness singers retrain their voices in rehearsal for each new

musical, bringing their own textures to the tune while also sonically citing all the voices that have taught them what the song is and how to carry it anew. The theories in *Blues Mamas and Broadway Belters* are absolutely part of my life in creative practice.

How should you read this book? I suggest that you at least skim the introduction, which has (toward the end) brief descriptions that are like a teaser of the chapters to come. This will give you a sense for which parts may interest you the most. Some parts of the book may be most fun for singers, some for people who love performance theory, some may be thought-provoking for voice teachers, and some especially meaningful to those invested in the history of US musical theatre, or in black female performance. In the appendix at the end of this book (and sprinkled throughout chapter 3) you'll find a set of whimsical vocal exercises to test out. They are not meant to be lessons per se, but more like invitations to sing along with the black women singers whose voices ring through the book. You could also think of these exercises as small poems or performance scores. Most of the book is written from my perspective as a scholar, singer, and voice teacher, but my background as a songwriter also inflects my analysis at times. And I do write directly about my experience as a musical theatre writer, in relation to the primary ideas of the book, in the closing section, the "Playoff."

Finally, I want to note that when I set out to do the research for this book, I knew very little about the blues. Yet nowadays when I teach courses in pop vocal styles for musical theatre performers, I begin with the blues. Writing this book has convinced me of how deeply the blues underlie American performance forms in so many styles, including vocal sound and technique for the musical theatre. Recently the blues have also called my name as a songwriter-dramatist, and I work on multiple new musicals that seem to have asked me, of their own volition, to write blues numbers for them. In the rehearsal room, the demo recording studio, the Zoom-bound virtual performance, and the songwriter's cabaret, I hear the blues come alive in the hands and voices of talented guitarists, pianists, and vocalists. I braid my own singing along the lines of these artists' voices and instruments, and my learning continues.

Thank *you* for bringing your own voice and presence to the work. Here we go. . . .

Note on Phonetic Transcription

Throughout *Blues Mamas and Broadway Belters*, in analyzing vocal performance on particular sung syllables, or particular vowel shapes and consonants within words, I employ the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a standardized system of phoneticization. In addition to its usefulness for linguists, IPA is used widely among voice scientists and singers in classical- and musical-theatre traditions. Recognizing that this specialized alphabet may be of limited use to nonpractitioners or those approaching the text from a different musical perspective, I precede the IPA transcription with my own italicized phoneticization of the sound. For example: Consider the *ih* [ɪ] and *ng* [ŋ] sounds in the word "sing."

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There are so many people who have poured love, and learning, and love of learning into me. This book is a testament to their faith in my work and their investments in the form of both ideas and care. I realize now that it was often when I felt least certain of my happiness that I was actually learning the most. I am thankful for the lessons and for the people who saw me through them.

I am truly grateful for the mentors who have guided this book, first of all my professors and advisors in the Performance Studies Department at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Alex Vazquez, whose critical precision, generosity, and elegance in prose and presence I have always admired, continues to guide me with patience, keen insight, and humor. Tavia Nyong'o has steadily encouraged me to believe there is a place in theatre and performance studies to engage the vocal practices I love. I remain inspired by Karen Shimakawa's rigorous and interdisciplinary approach to methodology, by the dialogic example of her pedagogy, and her reminder to always consider the exigency of the work. It was Deborah Kapchan who first introduced me to the field of sound studies and convinced me that the way I listen to the world really could make a meaningful contribution to scholarship. And I continue to be in awe of Fred Moten's mind, his courageous and gentle approach to teaching, and the way that he makes music of critical thought. At NYU I also learned so much in classes with Judith Casselberry, Barbara Browning, André Lepecki, Jason Stanyek, and José Muñoz, whose brilliance as a teacher still reverberates.

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whose work has helped me chart my own course since I excitedly read her doctoral dissertation the year it was completed, has been a kind and generous mentor and advocate in both intellectual and practical terms. I also thank the anonymous readers for their labor and for their warm, encouraging, and thorough feedback that has allowed me to think my ideas throughout more deeply and to streamline key aspects. At Duke University Press, I have had the good fortune to have Ken Wissoker's steadfast encouragement and thoughtful editorial guidance, and I am also grateful to Kate Mullen for her detail-oriented and kind follow-through.

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the "electrical closet" (it really was called that) in NYU's Department of Performance Studies working as an administrative secretary, I am thankful for the amazing staff and faculty of the department, who always supported me—whether as a receptionist coming in late because she was out writing musicals all night, or as a doctoral student with an unconventional timeline. Thank you to my former boss Noel Rodriguez and to my other former boss Jason Seth Beckerman. And I am grateful to the many graduate students who passed through the department while I was working there in the early 2000s—I have always regarded you as so many big siblings and remain inspired by your scholarship, persistence, and kindness. In particular I thank Sandra Ruiz for so many inspiring conversations, and for her brilliant example of weaving a life of poetry and critical theory and living courageously in the academy.

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Although I can't precisely recommend this path, I completed my PhD, and the preliminary research for this book, while working full-time as a fundraising and development professional and simultaneously growing a career as a musical theatre writer/composer. I am truly grateful for the support and flexibility of leaders and supervisors in my day-job life who made it possible for me to study and research in this way—especially Carol Becker, Jana Wright, and Roberta Albert at Columbia University School of the Arts, as well as Lisa Yeh and the incomparable Elena Piercy at Columbia Business School.

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buried in my laptop to find you excitedly pulling off your headphones and inviting me to hear the latest music you are writing. It means so much that you have always believed in me and encouraged me.

Finally, to those who are not yet sure if it is even possible to be a singer, or a scholar—thank you for your questioning and your process. You are the reason we teach. I hope you will encounter something here that helps you to find your way, and to move forward knowing there is a full congregation of singers we are always, ever, singing along with.

Introduction

Citing the Vocal-Possible

This book dwells with the singing voices of black women in the context of US musical theatre in the early and mid-twentieth century. I argue that this vanguard of black women singers on the musical stage comprised highly trained, effective voice teachers who sounded and transmitted vocal techniques heard over decades in Broadway belting to the present day. My argument unfolds the ways that singing is citational practice, and that "singing along with" others is a viable method of vocal study—one that propelled the careers and secured the prowess of many of the black singers considered here. Throughout, I listen from the perspectives of the singer and the voice teacher, in a mode that might be considered listening by singing; that is to say . . . singing as an act of listening to black women.

What kinds of voices are thought to be possible for a black woman singer on the musical stage?[1] The urgency of this question arose from my experiences as a voice coach and composer-dramatist in the New York City musical theatre scene over two decades. As a performer, my own facility for navigating the Broadway audition circuit proved fairly limited. But I have remained the friend and confidant of many black women musical theatre performers over the years, increasingly those whom I coach and who perform my own musical theatre works. Among friends, the conversation about this or that audition often turns to the expectations of the producing team for whom a given actress recently auditioned. Regardless of the range of colors and styles borne in a singer's voice, time and again I have heard talented black performers lament having been expected to produce only one category of vocal sound. "Take us to church!" the casting directors demand, excitedly.[2] In this context, many a black musical theatre actress's worth has seemed to be determined purely by the degree to which she is able to use her voice to pave a smooth and familiar road, generally for

white listeners, to what is often an imagined idea of black churchiness. This singer may be able to spin out, with equal ease, a breathy folk song, a husky jazz ballad, a golden-toned aria, a ragged rock scream. But often, none of these sounds are invited in the audition room, the liminal space through which the Broadway performer must successfully move if she is to earn a living with her art.

Of course, black people do not all sing the same way, and never have. I move beyond the presumed white audience of the early twenty-first century audition room and a theatre-going public still unreasonably invested in the idea of single-pointed black vocality to specify: What kinds of voices have *black women* thought and shown to be possible on the musical stage? This question has sent me in search of voice teachers, including those with whom black women singers might have chosen to study, historically. I pay attention to the way a series of voice instructors have posited the vocal-possible, for singers of any background and for black women singers in particular. Any teaching about the voice contains an inherent theory of voice and its possibilities.

In the literature on voice pedagogy, black women's voices are primarily understood as located within the realm of popular music, squarely in opposition to classical singing.[3] There is a pervasive narrative that black women singers of popular music such as the blues have always been "untrained," in possession of voices that sprang forth fully formed, just by the black churchiness of "feeling it." By contrast, I understand black women singers as not only voice students, but also voice teachers who taught and learned from one another. It is my aim to not only study early and mid-twentieth century black musical theatre performers, but to study *with* them. What do Sissieretta Jones, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Pearl Bailey, Juanita Hall, Lena Horne, Diahann Carroll, Eartha Kitt, Leslie Uggams, and their contemporaries have to say and to teach about voice? I take the "singing lesson" as a key site of performance for analysis as I consider how performances of vocal sound replicate and transmit knowledge.

The Church Soloist and Her Voice Coaches

When I was a student at Harvard in the late 1990s, and not yet the lapsed churchgoer that I am now, for a time I traveled every Sunday from my dormitory in Cambridge to the Dorchester Temple Baptist Church, the better part of an hour's train ride on the T. In my zeal, I even sang

in the church choir for a semester or two, inoculating myself against potential psychic illnesses of Ivy League life with regular doses of "black churchiness"—perhaps medium-strength in a church that had both black and white copastors at the time and where I recall once seeing a visiting Filipino dance troupe deliver an impassioned praise routine—but perhaps more potent than the dedicated if bookish Harvard Kuumba Singers gospel choir with which I also soloed and codirected a women's a cappella group.[4] At Dorchester Temple, I remember witnessing on more than one occasion a skinny, nervous young girl standing in front of the congregation to sing a solo. Often the unimpressive sound that came out at first was . . . not quite getting it done. But with the steady support of the congregation, so many firmly committed deaconesses clapping and invoking the Spirit ("Come on, baby. . . . Yes, Lord"), the scraggly first verses of the solo swelled in confidence, gradually rising to soar clean and strong above the choir in triumph, bringing churchgoers to their feet to celebrate this fresh evidence of the divine. The miracle of God was none other than the reworking of something inadequate, uncertain, not-quite-ready into the proud, representative voice of a God-fearing people.

Each time it happened, this miracle would strike me as proof that, even within the course of one song, a distinct progression in expressive ability is possible. Even if the singer is not sure how to "feel it"—or, perhaps, how to technically produce the sound needed to meaningfully deliver her song—through practice over multiple verses, with encouragement at key junctures, she is able to move into a stronger, more supple vocal sound. The lone singer in front of the congregation does not produce that powerful, rippling voice all on her own, but with the coaching of both the choir and musicians behind her and the congregation before her. She is audibly encouraged when her voice begins to soar, and so prompted to venture to soar higher. Thus even within the "take me to church" framework, it must be noted, singers encounter and must master particular kinds of singing lessons, of which this is just one example. Sometimes, singers' training in the church choir rehearsal allows technique in both classical and gospel traditions to flower—confounding essentialist assumptions that black church choirs always sing in precisely the same ways. As black Broadway and off-Broadway performers have commented to me meaningfully, "We do not all go to the same church."[5]

I also suggest that the myriad lessons given in this context are ongoing; coaching happens anew and in fresh ways with each singing of a song. The dynamism of voice coach and singer, the deaconess urging on the church

soloist, is what calls up the sound that theatre producers are eager to hear from black singers at musical theatre auditions. And yet in that enclosed context the black musical theatre singer is expected to be both singer and congregation, producing a static, fully encapsulated blackness for the white ear. This "fixing" of blackness, reducing it to an isolated, set quality ("feeling it") disavows the ideas of progression, expanse, development, change, and vocal copresence—whether over the course of verses or decades. And it is this disavowal I critique in the chapters that follow. So the idea of ongoing vocal study is also central to this book, displacing the idea of singers who "can sing" or "have learned to sing" with the idea of singers who continue to grow and change in their sound over time and in differing sets of musical circumstances. And the singers I engage here trained their voices in a variety of settings, sometimes the studio of the private voice instructor, but also the vaudeville circuit, the nightclub stage, the Juilliard classroom, the concert hall, the dance school, and the television variety show.

Black Feminist Study and the Vocal-Possible

This book focuses on black women singers, not least because these are the performers whom I wish I had known about when I sought to imagine my own path into musical theatre as a singer-actress. I became a composer and writer for the musical theatre because the disjuncts of racialized perception and my own lived experience paved my path to the piano to write new songs and stories rather than try to wriggle into existing, ill-fitting parts.[6] It is not an accident that so many writers and composers of color presently working in musical theatre pen shows that are in some way autobiographical or, in Michael R. Jackson's preferred term, self-referential. We are working to literally write ourselves into a genre and industry that generally makes it quite clear we are welcome only in prescribed roles whose expressive contours are largely predetermined.[7] This study is a part of the larger project I am pursuing to write myself and people like me into the Broadway musical in positions of greater expressive possibility.

The black women singers studied in this book demand not just greater space but the deeper focus of intense listening. A photograph of Eartha Kitt in the 1957 musical *Shinbone Alley* (figure I.1) depicts her standing downstage center, arms flung up above her head, in a wide stance angled just so to reveal a glimpse of black tights-clad legs to one inner thigh beneath the fitted dress cinched at the left hip, skirt falling on the bias. It is

I.1. Eartha Kitt and ensemble in *Shinbone Alley* (1957). Courtesy of the Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

a moment preparatory to or just following singing, and there is a look of determination on her face, one of those fierce stares Kitt was famous for, a look of such intensity that it radiates outward into the space. A few steps away and upstage, the multiracial cast surrounds her, arms extended but lower to the ground, ceding space to the star. Telling the story or listening to the song with the black woman singer up front and center stage results in understanding the world according to quite different terms than those along which it is often represented.

The world that is sung into being by black women's voices is vast, collectively authored, and spun from the nuance of vocal details with seemingly small value—"a bent note, a throwaway lyric."[8] Yet, after Daphne Brooks, black women's singing is revolutionary because it is a practice "inextricably linked to the matter of Black life."[9] In singing, black women imagine futures and present realities into being—asserting and delighting in and conjuring possibilities where it has often been said that none exist. If your future is not possible, how can you imagine and live out your present? This is why the singing of black women is radical work that opens lesser-known avenues of understanding in both the world and the theatre. As Stacy Wolf argues in her feminist history of the Broadway musical, turning from a focus on heterosexual love stories in musicals to foreground women themselves and their relationships with one another in performance—whether as characters or, as I study here, as interpreters of song and character—allows for new understandings of Broadway.[10] Listening first and foremost to black women and moving through a black feminist approach enables new understandings of what musical theatre has been and what it may be. For these reasons, and in this way, I grapple with the vocal-possible that every singer seeks and fights for and immerses herself in and breathes out like fire across the stage.

In what follows, the discrete encounter of the singing lesson emerges as an important site and scenario of performance for analysis, also pointing up particular kinds of voice lessons that have gone unnoticed or negated. Teaching is often understood as a feminine and feminized activity, perhaps to the point that it seems uncomfortably appropriate to a book about women. The same has been said for the voice itself: "song is heard as naturally feminine, just as speech is naturally masculine."[11] Yet I am interested in thinking about the deeply theoretical contributions made by women who might otherwise be considered *just teachers* or *just voice teachers*.[12] Remember too that the classroom and other formal learning environments are spaces from which black people in the United States have systematically been ex-

cluded.[13] I attend to and reclaim a series of events that have not always been considered voice lessons as such. This involves taking seriously the sounds, statements, and listening practices of not only audience members, critics, and fans but also those of singers, accompanists, and voice coaches.

The scenario of the singing lesson as engaged here, if extrapolated to the broader category of music lesson, may well prove a useful frame for inquiry beyond the study of black women on the musical stage. But I want to be clear that the black feminist work of this analytic invites a particular mode of musical engagement—the practice of *singing along with*—that does not easily align with the valorized figure of the woodshedding, solitary horn player practicing for hours on end in a lonely room nor the competitive display of intertextual prowess in cleverly citing songs or phrases within one's own musical improvisation and/or composition.[14] By overtly invoking the notion of vocal technique in relationship to black women's performances, this book also enters into a conversation with formulations of technique in modern vocal pedagogy—both technique and vocal health, which this literature reveals as its de facto equivalent. To a much greater degree than for musicians whose technique does not rely as emphatically on the body as instrument, this precise link between (or collapsing of) health and technique is thrown into especially sharp relief by vocalists and voice practice.

Singing Techniques and Twice-Heard Behavior

Consider that the production of vocal sound is a learned technique of the body, even in circumstances where formal training in vocal technique named as such might seem to be absent.[15] Like other categories of bodily training, vocal instruction often takes place in informal settings, that is, not in classrooms, nonetheless transmitting techniques for learning to manipulate or play the body in specific, culturally prescribed ways. The notion of an array of embodied techniques also usefully displaces the concept of one monolithic "technique" as a territory to be policed. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century English-language voice pedagogy literature has much to say about what constitutes correct (read: "healthy") singing technique. Often, technique is figured as an idealized land to which one does or does not have access, and to which any access is conditional—the smallest misstep, repeated once too often, results in banishment. In this view, there can be no return to technique for the ruined voice, although the possessor of

such a voice may be afforded the role of powerful border guard at the technical frontier. Manuel Garcia II, perhaps the most famous voice teacher in modern voice pedagogy, described his turn from singing opera to teaching opera singers as a pivot that resulted because early abuse had "ruined" his own instrument.[16] But this notion of the singing voice as stable territory that preserves the mythic (unruined) authentic self, the singular coherence of self and agency, has been shored up over centuries by the vocal pedagogy of European classical music. It is precisely this venerated belief that Katherine Meizel sharply critiques in her book *Multivocality: Singing on the Borders of Identity*.[17] For the present-day musical theatre, singers absolutely train in multiple vocal styles, invoking and maneuvering across music from varied expressive cultures and historical moments. It is also in contrast to this idea of a single-pointed technique that in chapter 4 I engage the Estill voice method as heterotopic pedagogy, instruction that posits vocal technique as a multiplicity of options from which a singer can formulate her sound according to her choosing.

Understanding voice practice as a technique of the body enables a move away from the fixedness that the term "technique" has sometimes called up when applied to music along with its cousins, style and genre.[18] The analysis here instead focuses on the specificity of technique within vocal sounds by attending to certain racial histories they carry. I am interested in the ways that styles are unstable or porous, and how certain performance techniques of voice have traveled across them. An overemphasis on musical style and genre might seem to obscure the ways certain vocal sounds are threaded through blues, vaudeville, "coon shouting," ragtime, torch singing, musical comedy song, nightclub performance, and Broadway belting. The work of this book is not to demarcate the particulars of styles of musical performance so that they can then be linked to markers of race, culture, or identity; rather, it is to consider what it might mean to track the flow of vocal sound across these various expressive categories.

Attending to the multiplicity and flow of techniques allows for an understanding of vocal technique as something that emerges over time. The contexts in which vocal techniques are strengthened—or clarified, or experimented with, or undone—are what I hear as singing lessons. What are the ways and routes by which the learning of vocal technique happens? Via the popular singing techniques of blues singers and shouters, whose "lessons" are rarely identified in the archive as such, I trace historical singing contexts and moments in which one singer taught a song to another. Through this work, I trouble the pervasive narrative around the

black woman shouter or white woman belter whose "untrained" sound is deemed a marvel for seemingly having sprung forth from nowhere. And from these lessons of content, the transmission of sung repertoire, arises a theory about the dynamism of vocal sound as a citational practice.

The performance of song is a particular modality of what has famously been called "twice-behaved behavior."[19] At first impression, this would seem to be merely that of "twice-sung." No singer can fully claim for her song the status of firstness; even so-called new songs recombine longstanding elements. But in addition to this quality, more productively, the dynamism of song performance also calls up a *twice-heardness*. The twice-heard song is heard by both singer and listener, teacher and student. Its once-againness ensures that, even where singer and listener are one and the same, she nonetheless always also listens in to past singers. Attending to twice-heardness foregrounds the multivocality of song: in hearing variously, listeners produce various voices. Thus, in the case of the sonic, there is a dimension of critical distance produced by double-behaving vocal sound that can be felt not just between character and actor and not just between the racialized individual and the consciousness of white perception.[20] This critical distance exists also in the plurality of listenings and listeners; it is these distances which, as Nina Eidsheim theorizes, produce the polyvalent vocal sound itself via the act of listening.[21]

Every singer, by virtue of the sonic materiality of her song, is rendered both a teacher and student, both voicer and listener. So I listen to the blues shouter's lessons—those she teaches and those she attends—as well as the many colors of her sound, and the bleed of her shouting into and through Broadway belting, a twice-heard sound.

Sonic Citation and This Thing of Honor

In April 2021, barely a year past the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I Zoomed into a talk given by Fred Moten at the "Comparing Domains of Improvisation" series with Columbia University. This heady group of music studies scholars and musicians steeped in the practical urgency of ideas either esoteric or deeply theorized cut a swathe of intense reflection through my hectic Zoom schedule. (On the one other occasion I attended an event organized by this group, we sat in extreme concentration in a white, windowless room in upper Manhattan.) Sitting at the kitchen counter in my Chicago apartment, I paused my harried click-commuting

through teaching, coaching voice, pitching for a Broadway writer gig, copy-editing a journal article, and planning a virtual residency for an international artist. And I arrived at the talk.

I arrive at Moten's voice, steady even when his camera image occasionally freezes: the measured thinking, understated delivery, rhythms of speech I can't hear as hesitance but instead as ongoing invitation to be and think together, a willingness to allow for complex thoughts that require careful unraveling, and to begin to do the work to unravel them in the moment, now, one strand at a time. After all, this lecture series is about improvisation. Tracing the lines of thinking along which he has traveled across his career, Moten speaks about a certain kind of corrective he is trying to move into these days in relation to his first book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*.[22] He now realizes that at that time he was trying to critique modes of rationality that, incongruously, he still tried to leverage on behalf of the improvising musicians he studied. All this when really, he says, he needed to let go of being concerned with "the honor of black musicians." While as a performance scholar he did not want to position these players on the line between the animal and the human—and which of us in the academy today is comfortable saying that black musical artistry is simply part of the natural order? We know it inflicts the double violence of essentializing black people and disavowing black people's creative expertise—he can now concede, with some humor, that the musicians themselves were less worried about this. To take two hard-playing saxophonists, he continues: Charlie Parker was literally known as "Bird." Eric Dolphy would get up early in the morning to play along with the birds and birdsong. What mattered to them was the music, not the kind of recuperative honor the academy purports to be able to bestow. "I needed to get past this whole thing about honor," Moten said.[23]

But I stumble over this idea. In the Q&A I ask: "How did you get past that? Is there something that has to be sacrificed?"[24] Of note, this talk takes place two days after the conviction of George Floyd's murderer was announced. The national sense that the vindication of black life is something that must be fought for is just in the air. This despite the fact that it can never actually settle a score or bring true justice while a lynched man remains dead; or while women like Breonna Taylor who are slaughtered by racial violence remain largely forgotten and somehow perceived as less vindicatable. This despite the fact that all year I have been pleading with a loved one to abandon systems that, I believe, will never respect him (despite

endless vacuous institutional statements to the contrary and time-wasting meetings to talk about black life instead of nurturing it), the hours I have spent pleading with this person to focus instead on stoking the fires of his own spirit. But I notice, in this moment at this talk, that I still feel: We have to fight for honor, don't we? Or if we are in the position to give it freely, shouldn't we do so? In the Africanist musical and poetic sense of giving appellations for a revered elder or leader, I have somehow internalized the belief that it is my responsibility if not to procure honor or respect, at least to give it freely where I can.

Moten explains: "The recovery of the honor of the black musician is another form of submission to a set of standards that I utterly repudiate. . . . I repudiate those opinions and standards," and forgo "whatever comforts I might derive from" them.[25] To give power to such standards, he teaches, comes at the cost of not fully engaging what black people are actually doing. Not actually listening to the music on the music's terms, and on the musician's terms. At this point in the conversation, in the heated tone, the recourse to blunt language, the affective charge and candor to admitting that it *does* hurt to be reminded "like eighteen times a day" of the subordinate place one is meant to have in this system, I hear in Moten's voice that the cost cuts deep. Refusing the imperative to seek honor and recognition for black musicians, then, requires sacrificing the seductive illusion that in doing so we will have escaped or defeated a racist system. On the other hand, simply acquiescing to the expectation that we must seek honors for black artists can only rob us of the more meaningful scholarship we could be bringing forth, if we paid full attention to what the artists are actually doing on their own terms. The primary aim of scholarship on black art does not have to be to prove that the art is honorable according to white supremacist frameworks. As Toni Morrison has counseled, in her own measured and unsparing speech, in an audio recording of a 1975 talk at Portland State University's Black Studies Center:

> The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.[26]

I move through this series of lessons, heard in Moten's voice and Morrison's voice, because I want to be clear that the sonic citations I write about in this book, in the full-flowering of their twice-heardness, do not necessarily afford avenues to greater honor in the conventional sense for these artists. In singing after and with them, sonically citing their voices, I cannot say that I am heaping flowers on their memories. Each citation is sonic memory in reiterated motion, after Eidsheim, "music in action," so where should the flowers go? [27] The nondiscursive nature of sound means that its citation does not come with a name attached in so many words. Its provenance, its evidence of origins, does not travel by means of the textual sign but rather, the *textural*, the timbral, the aspirated, and the released sound.

In her book *Bitter Roots: The Search for Healing Plants in Africa*, my sister Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, a historian of science, argues that the medical encounters between traditional healers and African and European scientists do not map neatly onto redemptive narratives of either scientific eurekas or ancient, originary knowledge located with one isolated ethnic group in one remote locale. She explains: "Narratives of discovery often fixate on singular inventors and original tribes, yet these accounts are often more mythic than historical."[28] Nonetheless, the ideas of property and ownership claims to novelty, to being *the first* to possess specific knowledge, have concrete implications for the economic well-being of individuals and rural communities, and certainly for the legal claims and financial gain of pharmaceutical companies. The concrete benefits that accrue to those who claim originarity can be felt both in medicinal practice, as my sister studies, and in musical-theatrical practice, as I study here. We are all globally entangled in what can also be understood as this settler colonial mentality of discovery and staking a claim. The very idea of appropriation is grounded in this way of understanding the world: that someone originally owned something and then it was stolen.[29] However, my sister's book traces "healing plant diasporas" that took shape as Africans have historically redistributed medicinal knowledge, recipes for healing, and herbal seeds across different geographic locations. The romance of the redemptive and honor-conferring claim to originary, stable knowledge remains strong. Yet, as my sister tells me, plants and the medicinal practices they occasion simply don't operate according to this logic. Seeds blow on the wind. And so does singing.

It is evidence of the tight-closed grip of settler colonial ways of knowing that it can feel overwhelmingly disrespectful to consider citing a black woman singer without accurately inscribing her name in the citation. In a

logic mapped by the planting of flags and staking of claims, it is easy to be pulled along in the scramble to assert the value of sounds in terms of property and ownership. As Moten also testifies, certainly there is a felt cost to forgoing the scrambling and the asserting. But what if, in the compact aphorism-lyric from a song by punk vocalist and Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq has it, in fact, "Money has spent us."[30] As xwélmexw artist and scholar Dylan Robinson (stó:lō/Skwah) teaches, it is possible to exist and move as a theorist and listener by means other than the extractive, settler colonial approach that too often forms the unmarked baseline of scholarly or musical inquiry. Beyond the circuits and mindsets of starvation, Robinson deftly articulates, exist perceptual logics with the potential to call forth more resurgent ways of understanding and living.[31] It is in this spirit that I offer not only the theoretical concept of sonic citation, the twice-heardness of vocal sound, as a tool for the interpretation of performance. Sonic citation also presents an invitation to creative practice, a recipe to sing in the clear and joyful knowledge of voices one is ever *singing along with*.

Listening to Black Women on Broadway

In the chapters that follow, I listen to and invite new ways of singing along with black women singer-actresses in US musical theatre between 1900 and 1970. When the black woman singer on Broadway is invoked in the present day, she is most often heard in terms of iconic roles such as Dorothy in *The Wiz* (1975) and Effie in *Dreamgirls* (1981), with repertoire built on musical styles from popular music which had, by that time, had long histories outside of vaudeville and musical comedy.[32] *The Wiz* was one of the first successful shows on Broadway by a black creative team since the days of Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle's *Shuffle Along* (1921). Indeed, the early decades of the twentieth century saw a flowering of black talent on the US musical stage; the 1900s and 1920s have been called the most important decades for black musical theatre.[33] The 1970s ushered in an equally vibrant decade for black musicals on Broadway, in part because artists sought to reclaim and historicize the work of early black musical theatre such as that of the 1920s heyday.[34] Of course, the precise definitions of what counts as a black musical have been articulated according to a range of differing criteria at different times.[35] Suffice to say, the goal of this book is not to further delineate and isolate the so-called black musical but rather to focus on black women performers themselves. The singer-actresses I study move

through various performance spaces including those for primarily black audiences and those for primarily white audiences. The musical stages that interest me most during the 1900s and 1920s are those beyond Broadway, not the celebrated cakewalking and charlestoning black Broadway shows of the era but the vaudeville-blues stages where black women blues singers honed powerful vocal techniques.[36] This approach is useful for my black feminist project of augmenting existing work that hails unrecognized "fathers of black musical theatre."[37]

The 1970s birthed several highly successful musicals showcasing black talent that, in addition to *The Wiz* and Harlem Renaissance–fabulous revues such as *Bubbling Brown Sugar* (1976), also included two musical versions of plays by black playwrights, adapted by white authors: *Purlie* (1970), after Ossie Davis's *Purlie Victorious*, and *Raisin* (1973), after Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*. The decade also birthed *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* (1972), written and composed by the pathbreaking black singer-actress and composer/writer Micki Grant, choreographed by George Faison, and directed by Vinnette Carroll, who became with this production the first black woman to direct on Broadway. When *The Wiz* arrived on Broadway in 1975, the composers of its score, led by Charlie Smalls, a Juilliard-trained jazz musician and nightclub pianist who would go on to win Tony and Grammy awards, also included Timothy Graphenreed, whose previous credits were principally as a dance arranger; Harold Wheeler, who was Burt Bacharach's hand-picked music director for *Promises, Promises* (1968) and later became a legendary Broadway and Hollywood orchestrator; choreographer George Faison, a former Ailey dancer; and R&B artist Luther Vandross.[38] Appearing six years later, *Dreamgirls*—written and composed by white writer and composer Tom Eyen and Henry Krieger, respectively, and profoundly shaped by the white director-choreographer Michael Bennett—was explicitly about Motown. Having failed to nurture a generation of black songwriters and librettists, Broadway sourced the composers and the sound for later Broadway musicals showcasing black talent from the worlds of pop, Motown, soul, and R&B.

The scope of opportunities available to black performers who appeared on Broadway from the 1930s through the 1960s was necessarily impacted by the dearth of black composers, lyricists, and producers working in the industry during this period. Black tunesmiths appeared disinterested in writing for the musical theatre in these decades, drawn by the greater allure of Hollywood, and midcentury Negro Theatre groups tended to focus on dramas rather than musicals.[39] Earlier decades saw a marked shift away

from black musicals produced by African American impresarios in the 1920s, whose proof of concept only resulted in their being edged out by white producers who sought to cash in on the success of shows like *Shuffle Along*.[40] In this context, the vocal and character type of the weary-bluesy mammy that Ethel Waters inhabited in the 1930s, as discussed in chapter 2, arose in direct relation to the shift away from black leadership in the arena of musical theatre producing.

As a result of these combined factors, and the definitive performances by Stephanie Mills, original Dorothy in *The Wiz*, and Jennifer Holliday, original Effie in *Dreamgirls*, the voice of a black woman on Broadway has become indexed in the American imaginary by a pop sound with a lineage that is heard as flowing through recorded popular music rather than the sound of what is often called the "Golden Age" of Broadway.[41] The title of chapter 3 is drawn from Diahann Carroll's felt experience of this dichotomy, what it meant to be a black woman vocalist who did not come up through the recording industry but knew instead that she sounded, as she put it, like "a little singer on Broadway." This split can also be understood as part of a trend, long decried, of Broadway music that has largely become, after the 1940s, its own separate genre that diverges from the popular music of the day. My goal here is not to delineate what constitutes Broadway music, but to acknowledge that the shift effected during the 1970s and 1980s by shows like *The Wiz* and *Dreamgirls* in ushering in a period with long-running, box office smash hits starring black women has tended to obscure what came before, in particular the performative and sonic contributions of black women who starred in Broadway musicals at midcentury.

There is also a certain erasure of the performances of black women on Broadway during the so-called Golden Age of musical theatre (1940s–1960s) that is enacted in the way that musical theatre histories are generally told. From *Show Boat* (1927) to *Oklahoma*! (1943) to *West Side Story* (1957) to *Cabaret* (1966) to *Hair* (1968) and *Company* (1970) to *Miss Saigon* (1991) to *Rent* (1996) and *Hamilton* (2015)—to trace one possible articulation—historians and musical theatre aficionados thrill to the cult of hit shows, a line of beloved works held up as exemplary and/or groundbreaking, even if taken to be mildly flawed in interesting or provocative ways. Thus the story of Broadway is narrated in terms of successful shows, in a broadly accepted litany of "great works." If in retrospect certain shows are deemed unsuccessful, or worse, embarrassingly out of date, even racist, the performances of the actors who starred in them are excised from the narrative regardless of the acclaim they may have received in their time.[42] Although it is the star

who sells tickets, and so functions as the gem in the producer's crown, historians of musical theatre have tended to prioritize those gems with long-running careers in the form, that is, the stars who sparkled on the stages of one after another of the "great shows." This elite circle has rarely included black women stars on Broadway, in any era, each of whom has typically had one or at most two "great shows" to her name.[43] The extent to which Broadway writers and composers were simply not writing star vehicles for black women is perhaps a subject for another book. Certainly, I take note in chapter 3 of the rapidity with which Diahann Carroll and Leslie Uggams, on the heels of their 1960s Tony wins, shook the dust of Broadway from their feet and built the bulk of their careers in television and film where performance opportunities were far more forthcoming. In any case, when the shows in which black women starred are erased from the narratives of "great shows," so too go their performances, as their presence and voices are reduced to mere anecdotes.

Within this context, I position myself as a scholar, listener, and voice student. In addition to studying singing lessons given and attended by black women and their contemporaries on the vaudeville-blues circuit and in early Broadway musicals, I focus on a set of black women singers in Broadway's "Golden Age," primarily those who won its most coveted prize, the Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theatre, or the Tony Award.[44] Listening closely to black women belters on Broadway and their contemporaries, I draw out aspects of their performances as a legacy of coachings and vocal exercises for the aspiring singer-theorist in the present day.

In the Scholarly Interdisciplines

By bringing vocal sound into hearing along with theories on race and gender as well as research on health, music studies, and musical theatre history, this project moves across several scholarly fields. I am indebted to the works of scholars at the intersection of performance studies and popular music studies that trace genealogies of US musical performance by artists of color, engaging the politics of race, queerness, gender, and sexuality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[45] Where scholars of performance have engaged blackness and nineteenth-century performance forms such as minstrelsy, burlesque, vaudeville, and early musical theatre, they have rarely considered the legacy of these performances for the twentieth-century musical stage. This is my project. And despite a marked interdis-

ciplinarity, the field of performance studies has not often troubled the distinction between high and low art that continues to police certain disciplinary boundaries within the academy. Scholars working on music and sound from a performance studies approach have often located their work in proximity to popular music studies and ethnomusicology—reinforcing the unspoken assumption that bodies of color are confined to these fields—or else aligned with the avant-garde. Fred Moten and George Lewis have eloquently critiqued the notion that the avant-garde is necessarily white; without denying the particular claims to the popular that black expression may make, blackness is not always, nor only ever, heard in popular song.[46]

This book directly engages the ways that musical theatre stages a rupture in the boundary between elite and popular art at the level of multivocal singing practice. My project enacts a certain sonic bleed of popular music studies into critical vocal pedagogy, and music studies more broadly, listening to the concert voice in counterpoint with, for example, the jazz voice. This work addresses a vital question raised by Loren Kajikawa, "How can popular music studies help to overcome ongoing racial inequality within schools and departments of music?"[47] The extant voice pedagogy and voice science literature, within which popular singing training is a relatively new topic, stands to gain a great deal from a more thoughtful engagement of the historicity of race and vocal sound—a topic I examine in detail in chapter 4, especially vis-à-vis the problematic rubric of "Contemporary Commercial Music" posited by voice teacher and researcher Jeannette LoVetri that is now widely in use. The analysis of musical theatre performers and performances here also invites a greater focus on musical and embodied sound within scholarly analysis of Broadway musicals, extending the work of writers such as Jake Johnson, Ben Macpherson, and Elizabeth Wollman.[48] As a field, musical theatre studies has the opportunity to gain a great deal from more supple theorization of vocal sound, and an understanding of the indebtedness of this sound to multiple musical influences—including popular vocal performance.[49]

The account of musical theatre history that I give is revisionist in the sense that I consider it primarily from the perspective of women singer-actors. The chapters that follow throw into relief the ways that attention to black women singers and their vocal practices across time can augment, frustrate, or reroute well-worn accounts of historical musical theatre performance in the United States. I am especially interested in considering the sounds of musical theatre history as *experience* rather than *narrative*.[50] Understanding singing as citational practice means we are dwelling

with and reanimating history whenever we open our mouths to sing. In the Africanist sense: ancestors and the ancestral past are ever with us. The Akan principle of sankofa teaches, via the symbol of a bird reaching its beak backward: *Go back and get it. It is not bad to go back for what you have forgotten*.[51] "Go back" means crane your neck and reach behind to know what you already carry. And so the history I write about is always carried in the mouth, called forth and reanimated in its re-expression. Singing produces history in that it brings the past into the air, enabling attention, witnessing, and copresence.

In disciplinary terms, my purpose is less to correct the official historical record than to open conditions of greater expressive possibility for musical theatre artists, and especially black musical theatre artists. Instead of seeking primarily to fill in the gaps in incomplete histories, I grapple with Tracy Davis's evocative question for theatre and performance historians: "What might the unseekable be?"[52] By confounding ocularcentric beliefs that what is knowable is limited to what is seen, and proffering a richly opaque site of nondiscursivity—performance ever-elusive to textual capture—the history of vocal *sound* in musical theatre performance may be unseekable precisely because it is *already here*, already heard, sonically cited and present in performance today. Thus, the revision I hope to make to musical theatre history is in fact a revision to musical theatre's present and possible future—one that allows for hearing black women artists as always manifest in the song and in the singing, then as now.

Performance Analysis via Creative Practice

The approach to performance analysis in this book leverages my more than two decades as a musical theatre artist, in particular as a singer turned voice coach. I have been working with the building blocks of the Estill voice method, studied in chapter 4, from the time I was a child; its theory of the voice as multiply configurable has had a significant impact on my own understanding of what it means to be a singer, voice student, and voice teacher in myriad ways.[53] Challenging widely accepted yet vague terms such as "bright" and "dark" timbre, or "head" and "chest" voice, Estill practitioners make the case that the ear can be deceiving. The sound that seemed to be "nasal" may not in fact resonate in the nose. The "loudness" of a bright voice may actually be an aural illusion, an acoustical trick that the savvy

singer uses to her advantage. A key focus of my study is to explore how listening alongside singers and voice teachers allows for particular kinds of rigor and precision in the critical discussion of vocal sound and embodiment. At the same time, the instructions given by Estill teachers that "your body should be louder than your voice, "or that singers should seek to "hallucinate the feeling of your bones" to produce specific vocal sounds may be understood as theoretical or metaphysical ruminations.[54] I engage voice methods including Estill not simply as a practice or performance that is illustrative of theory, but as theoretical assertions in their own right.[55]

This project also draws obliquely on my positionality as a musical theatre composer and lyricist to deepen my work as a performance scholar. While musical theatre history is the material through which my argument moves, the method by which I move as a performance analyst is one that delves into modes of musical-theatrical expression, and particularly, the shapes and effects of theatre song. In my practical approach to writing a scholarly book, I draw inspiration from the form of the musical itself. One thing that musicals can do beautifully is use songs to "telescope through" narrative time and space, as Broadway lyricist and mentor Lynn Ahrens once explained to me.[56] Musical theatre songs enable multiple access points to an overarching story beyond the constraints of everyday temporal logics or even linearity.[57]

In this vein, my argument proceeds by the primary means of analysis anchored in individual songs, even while I construct performers' training biographies within sociohistorical contexts.[58] It is as a voice coach who thinks in terms of songwriting and musical dramatism that I conjure up the sonic doings of theatrical songs and the voices that realize them in this book. In a musical, the song is a metonym for the whole show. It is a world unto itself. Although this deep focus on performances of specific songs as documented in audio and televised recordings—the discrete turn of phrase, release of a note, attack and grain of minute sounds—yields insights certain to be relevant to the larger frame, for the most part the analysis of the broader musicals as dramatic and literary works falls outside the focus of this book. I attend to the vocal actions that the singer is scripted and scored to produce (song in the sense of the road she must travel) as well as the interpretive choices she makes about how to do so (song in the sense of the way that she travels that road).[59] This attunement to the black singer and her "book" of songs makes possible a version of musical theatre performance history that moves beyond the well-established trend of reifying the contributions of white musical theatre songwriters.[60]

Structure and Scope

Structurally, this project arcs through four chapters that each focus on a different aspect of voice practice and teaching—voice lessons, coachings in how to listen, vocal exercises, and the critical theorizing of voice pedagogues. The first three chapters unfold in loosely chronological order, examining the transmission of various vocal techniques that may be considered under the capacious canvas tent or proscenium arch, as the case may be, of musical theatre belting. These are studied via a parade of types of singers—vaudeville-blues singers and shouters in the 1900s to 1920s, black torch singers and character singer-actresses in the 1930s and 1940s, on to nightclub vocalists, television variety performers and black Broadway glamour girls in the 1950s and 1960s. The final chapter addressing voice pedagogues spans the long twentieth century, from the late nineteenth century advent of modern, clinical voice teaching up to late twentieth and early twenty-first century voice training methods.

Chapter 1, "Vocal Color in Blue: Learning the Song with Blueswomen, Shouters, and Belters" counters the suggestion that black women singers of popular song in the early twentieth century were untrained. Examining the influence of the blues shouter's vocal sound on what became the Broadway belter's technique, the chapter invokes a line of historical singing lessons, the contexts and moments in which singers taught particular songs to one another and in which, I contend, vocal technique was also part of what was being transmitted. In addition to Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith, I listen for lessons attended by white ragtime vocalists also known by the distasteful term "coon shouters," including Jewish star Sophie Tucker, to whose sound Broadway belting is often linked. Here I discern lessons both acknowledged and disavowed. Through Ethel Waters, Sophie Tucker's voice teacher, and renowned in her day as both a blues mama and a Broadway performer, I point out the multiplicity of vocal colors in which blues music has been sung. Via the voice, I argue for the blues as not only an antecedent of jazz but also a vastly underacknowledged protogenre of the Broadway show tunes belted out by the likes of Ethel Merman.

In chapter 2, "Beyond the Weary-Bluesy Mammy: Listening Better with Midcentury Character Divas," I take care to heed the black woman singer's directives and instructions for how she should be heard. When blues tonality was taken up by Broadway songwriters, I note, much of the form's earthiness, humor, and self-determination was lost. The watered-down result from Tin Pan Alley was the sad, sad torch song of the weary-

bluesy mammy, a type Ethel Waters was repeatedly called upon to voice, despite the sharply different musical-theatrical aspirations Zora Neale Hurston had for her. I complicate this figure through Juanita Hall and Pearl Bailey—and briefly, Lena Horne via her outright refusal to appear on Broadway in the 1940s. In character roles leveraged to maneuver around the vocal type of the weary-bluesy mammy, these singers taught audiences to, as Bailey put it, "listen better." The understudied case of Hall, original Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*, is particularly generative, as she negotiated a path from the concert stage to the nightclub and, via vocal acts in what I term "high yellowface," convinced listeners to hear her voice as representative of Vietnam or Chinatown. Where the book's initial chapter traced lessons in how and what to sing, this second chapter collects a series of coachings in how to listen around the edges of racialized expectations for voice.

Chapter 3, "'A Little Singer on Broadway': Exercising American Glamour with Golden-Age Starlets" analyzes how 1950s and 1960s black women performers sang as stylish black ingénues and sex kittens previously unimaginable on Broadway. I begin with a study of Lena Horne and just why it was that she *didn't* headline on Broadway as a young starlet. Despite her refusals and the ways she was refused on the Jim Crow-era musical stage, Horne established—by different means from her carefree, white contemporary Mary Martin—strategies for performing girlhood that reverberated for the young black women who sang in her slipstream. Revising expectations for who could belt out show tunes and who could be a dewy-eyed ingénue in a mainstream musical, these performers included the first black women to win Tony Awards in the category of Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Musical—Diahann Carroll and Leslie Uggams. I examine how these ingénues built vocal sounds that both aligned them with and distinguished them from their white counterparts in the 1950s and 1960s, in conversation with pop music ingénues of the time. Following Horne/Martin and Carroll/Uggams, in a third duet between Japanese American belter Pat Suzuki and self-styled international cosmopolite Eartha Kitt, I study how each deployed the sexiness of her singing in unexpected ways to secure and elide claims around national belonging. My analysis further considers these singers' legacies for the Broadway stage in practical, ongoing terms. After Alexandra T. Vazquez's methodology of listening in detail, I linger with details and contours of these singers' performances and revoice their particularities as a set of "vocal exercises" that remain available to and relevant for aspiring singer-scholars today.

Finally, chapter 4, "Secrets of Vocal Health: Voice Teachers and Pop Vocal Technique" takes voice teachers and their training methods as objects of analysis, locating black women stars of the musical stage within the continuum of historical voice pedagogy in the United States. I analyze the way that US vocal pedagogy has constructed singing technique as bodily healthfulness, such that popular singing voices employed in blues shouting and Broadway belting are deemed unhealthy, even abusive. I argue that modern voice teaching is characterized by a Foucauldian medical regard predicated on the notion that the bodily interior is possessed of dangerous secrets to be divined by the expert ear. In this analysis, singers and voice pedagogues emerge as thinkers advancing distinct theories of race and vocal sound, pathologizing or fetishizing the black popular singing voice, as the case may be. I revisit the turn of the twentieth century with African American vaudeville star and operatic singer Sissieretta Jones, and her theory of the voice as that which is flexed in collectivity. Through Jones, and the preceding chapters' studies of and with black Broadway singers, I propose an alternate theory of ongoing singing study—learning to sing by *singing along with* . . . the possibility of technique as the pleasure in sharing an open secret. Via Abbey Lincoln and Hortense Spillers, I consider what the act of *singing along with* proffers for the black woman and her vocal-possible.

The limited scope of this project has rendered it impossible to include every single blues singer and black singer-actress who graced Broadway from 1900 to 1970. I feel keenly the absence of a detailed study of Florence Mills, the shining breakout talent of *Shuffle Along* (1921). How fortunate we are to have such a dazzling array of talented black women singers across Broadway history whose legacy is, I hope, refracted and extended in some small measure through this project. Another book entirely could be traced in terms of the artists who walked through the doors opened by the performers I study here—such as black actress Norma Mae Donaldson, Leslie Uggams's understudy for *Hallelujah, Baby!*, and Filipina actress Vi Velasco, Diahann Carroll's standby for *No Strings*. Additionally, the decision to close this study with the decade of the 1960s prevented the inclusion and analysis of numerous remarkable black women singer-actors who appeared in Broadway musicals from 1970 to the present day. This luminous roster includes Melba Moore, Stephanie Mills, Jennifer Holliday, Nell Carter, Lilias White, Armelia McQueen, Gretha Boston, Lonette McKee, Vanessa Williams, Heather Headley, LaChanze, Tonya Pinkins, Audra McDonald, Anika Noni Rose, Cynthia Erivo, Denée Benton, Nikki M. James, Renée

Elise Goldsberry, Kenita Miller, Rebecca Naomi Jones, Patina Miller, L Morgan Lee, Ariana DeBose, Danielle Brooks, Adrienne Warren, and Joaquina Kalukango—and the list goes on. Keeping the focus primarily to New York and the Northeastern United States has meant forgoing study of black women singer-actors who held forth on stages in Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles. The project also bears the distortions that come with a US-specific and Anglophone focus—in addition to the dynamic tradition of black British singer-actresses in the West End, would that I could have included the zarzuela performances of Cuban vedette Rita Montaner and Puerto Rican star Ruth Fernández, and the appearance of South African legend Miriam Makeba in Johannesburg jazz opera. May this book open up many more opportunities to study and learn from the vibrant sounds and vocal techniques that black women singers call forth in the artful practice of musical theatre singing.

Notes

Acknowledgments

An early version of chapter 1 of this book was published as "Vocal Colour in Blue: Early Twentieth-Century Black Women Singers as Voice Teachers," in *Performance Matters* 6, no. 2 (2020): 52–66; and portions of chapter 4 are published in "The Black Broadway Voice: Calls and Responses," in *Studies in Musical Theatre* 14, no. 3 (2020): 343–59.

Introduction

1 This is not a question about what kinds of voices *are* possible, which implies an assumption that the range of vocal sounds available to black women is necessarily limited because such sounds emanate from racialized bodies. This kind of thinking drifts far too easily to the logic of nineteenth-century pseudosciences that insinuate absurd racial classification systems, wielding measurements of skulls and bones and bodies to assert the relative capabilities, intellectual or otherwise, of individuals of different races. See Eidsheim, "Race and Aesthetics of Vocal Timbre," 338–65.

2 Asare, "The Black Broadway Voice," 343–59.

3 There have of course been many lauded black women singers of classical music, but the extant literature on voice pedagogy largely presumes their absence or glosses over their presence. As I discuss in what follows, "voice pedagogy" as a category is presumed to be classical voice pedagogy unless otherwise marked. Where I have found blackness invoked, generally it has been in the nascent literature on popular voice pedagogies.

4 I grew up in a religious space that posited an iterated form of Black Atlantic black churchiness that tends toward the illegible in the US context. As a child and teenager, my mixed-race family attended a church

in central Pennsylvania where the congregation's full-bodied, four-part hymn-singing in the Germanic and Anabaptist tradition reminds my west African father of the choral music from his Presbyterian missionary upbringing in Ghana, where his father was a choir director and church organist.

5 Asare, "The Black Broadway Voice."

6 Sood, "Neither Here Nor There," 337, 340. "When I first moved to New York I was an actor and no one knew how to cast me. I remember one of my first big callbacks for a Broadway show was *Bombay Dreams*. It really threw me because I was not South Asian and yet that was the way I was reading to casting directors. I think it was part of why I started writing. I felt like [as an actor] you can be judged at such a surface level, and there was, especially at that time, the idea that if you look something, you can just do it. If the mainstream audiences coming to the show would buy you in a role, then you should get up there. There's something wrong about that. I only made it through a couple callbacks and it kind of faded away. But I stopped auditioning soon after because it was really disorienting for me. I got into the BMI workshop and started being more of a writer."

7 This tradition of self-referential musical theatre by writers of color includes a series of Broadway and beyond-Broadway musicals, not only Jackson's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award–winning *A Strange Loop* (2019), but also Kirsten Childs's Obie Award–winning *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* (2000), and *Invisible Thread* by Griffin Matthews and Matt Gould—also titled *Witness Uganda* in various iterations beyond the Second Stage production in New York in 2015—as well as my own musical play *The Family Resemblance*, workshopped at the Eugene O'Neill Center in Waterford, Connecticut, in 2018. With the commercial theatre production of *In the Heights* (2008), Lin-Manuel Miranda literally wrote his person and presence onto the Broadway stage.

8 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 345.

9 Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution*, 3.

10 Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 18. Wolf asserts this project of focusing in on women and how they perform and relate also makes space for projects that are "undeniably queer." I celebrate the queer textures of listening to and singing along with other women, and specifically, with black women. Wolf's first book on musical theatre feminisms is also an important inspiration for this work. See Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria*.

11 Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 118.

12 Similarly, in writing about gender and voice in Puerto Rican popular music, Licia Fiol-Matta strategically animates and reclaims the disparaging way that women singers are lumped together as somehow extraneous to the grand trajectory of genius, male-authored music. See Fiol-Matta, *The Great Woman Singer*.

13 As Heather Williams details in her book *Self-Taught*, black Americans, historically denied access to education, have sought lessons by illicit or unorthodox means. See Williams, *Self-Taught*.

14 At the same time, the kind of musical education studied here stands in meaningful relation to the "egalitarian, nonhierarchical vision of pedagogy" George Lewis has painstakingly documented within the experimental work of black musicians in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians School in Chicago, founded in 1967. There, Richard Muhal Abrams articulated a view of musical training in the form of "collaboration between the so-called teachers and so-called students." See Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 177.

15 The way that I understand techniques of vocal practice has much to do with the notion of "techniques of the body" theorized by French sociologist Marcel Mauss, which has been so useful to dance studies. In assessing actions of the body and their particular quality as learned techniques, Mauss works through a litany of observations around walking, running, squatting, sleeping, swimming, marching, digging, spitting, dancing, climbing, having sex, breathing, laughing, and giving birth. He carefully notes that these behaviors, far from being somehow "natural" or inherent, are learned—the result of education and the imitation of those in positions of authority. Many of the techniques Mauss describes, such as laughing and breathing, implicate the voice directly; Mauss, "Techniques of the Body" (1934).

16 The understanding of voice as something that may be easily and permanently ruined pervades voice pedagogy, including that of two renowned nineteenth-century teachers, Garcia and G. B. Lamperti. Garcia asserts, "Freshness and steadiness are the most valuable properties of a voice, but are also the most delicate, easily injured, and quickly lost. When once impaired, they are never to be restored; and this is precisely the condition of a voice which is said to be 'broken' . . . [which] may be attributed to injudicious vocal education . . . the result . . . being, utterly to destroy the voice"; Garcia, *Garcia's New Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 8. And for his part, Lamperti cautions, "When the chest-voice is forced up too high, the head-voice loses in mellowness and carrying-power; how many beautiful alto voices have been ruined—caused to break—by this unnatural method!" See Lamperti, *The Technics of Bel Canto*, 24.

17 Meizel, *Multivocality*, studies what singers do to navigate multiple vocal identities in the act of singing across stylistic, cultural, geographic and bodily difference has much to offer for the study of voices in musicals.

18 I understand vocal styles, sounded via techniques of the body, as certainly engaged with the social yet neither a stable field within which layers and textures of musical expression happen nor an externalized object plucked from the wardrobe of social context. Stephen Feld has written about

style, in the context of playing in the groove, as a "musical order" in the process of being sustained. From the practitioner perspective, instructor of popular voice Donna Soto-Morettini describes musical styles as one or another suit of clothing that the vocalist puts on or takes off—style as vocal attire, or a sort of cosplay of the voice that veers uncomfortably close to the minstrel impulse to "black up." See Feld, "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style," 107; and Soto-Morettini, *Popular Singing and Style*.

19 My analysis builds on the germinal work of leading performance studies scholars. Richard Schechner theorizes ritual and theatre performance practices as "twice-behaved behavior." The twoness that interests him arises from the dynamism of the space between the performer's embodied self and symbolic other, and from the fact that any ritual performance necessarily restages past performances. Similarly, Diana Taylor establishes the "scenario" as a unit of the repertoire that effects a "once-againness" and stages "the generative critical distance between social actor and character." I extend this work by noting that songs take shape not only via theatrical repertoires but also in the context of the musician's set of tunes. The itinerant blues singer's repertoire manifests its particular textures of once-againness in a series of renditions which, after Christine Bacareza Balance, are ever in the process of being remade. Songs in the act of being resung again and again, Balance shows, unseat miraculous and hegemonic notions of origin and discovery. See Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 30, 32; and Balance, *Tropical Renditions*.

20 DuBoisian double consciousness famously invokes the kind of critical distance that operates as a dynamic, even resonant, gap between inner, affective experience—the way one feels oneself to be—and outer, visual aspect—the way one is taken to appear. As evidenced in writings spurred on by African American spirituals, what he called the "sorrow songs," for DuBois this critical distance clearly keys an attunement to song. See DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

21 I engage musical theatre singing as a form of the critical performance practice Eidsheim advocates and models in her work. See Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*.

22 Moten, *In the Break*.

23 Moten, "Comparing Domains of Improvisation," April 23, 2021.

24 Moten, "Comparing Domains of Improvisation," April 23, 2021.

25 Moten, "Comparing Domains of Improvisation," April 23, 2021.

26 Morrison, "Black Studies Center Public Dialogue. Pt. 2." I thank Michael R. Jackson for directing me to this Morrison quote in the spring of 2021.

27 Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*.

28 Osseo-Asare, *Bitter Roots*, 2.

29 E. Patrick Johnson writes, regarding the slipperiness that adheres to notions of authenticity: "And yet human commingling necessarily entails

the syncretism whereby cultures assimilate and adopt aspects of each other. Indeed, as 'white always seems to attract stains,' black similarly seems to absorb light." See Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 5.

30 Tagaq, *Tanya Tagaq—Retribution*.

31 Robinson, *Hungry Listening*.

32 Throughout this book I include the year in which a given musical first appeared on Broadway as the parenthetical following its first mention in the text. In many cases, of course, a show had a production history prior to arriving on Broadway, whether in London or regionally in the United States. Despite all the ways that I feel in my bones that Broadway should not be taken as the only, nor the best, site of meaningful musical theatre, I have followed this convention for the sake of consistency and in the interest of providing an at-a-glance sense of the timeframe in which each of these musicals emerged. In several cases the year that the show opened on Broadway is different from the year in which a Tony Award for its star was awarded; the Tony Awards ceremony generally takes place in the spring of a given year in recognition of all the plays and musicals that have opened during the prior season, which extends across two calendar years.

33 Hatch, "A White Folks Guide to 200 Years of Black and White Drama," 18.

34 See especially chapter 1 of Poulson-Bryant, "Strollin' through Broadway History," 155–73.

35 Donatella Galella expertly maps this history. See Galella, *America in the Round*. See in particular chapter 4, "Cultivating *Raisin* and the Popular Black Musical."

36 As Nadine George-Graves observes, studies of 1920s black theatre have long privileged the Harlem Renaissance movement yet the circuits and reach of black vaudeville constitute a vibrant space within which to consider the impactful work of black women artists. See George-Graves, *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville*, 2. George-Graves studies the influence of the celebrated Whitman Sisters in performance, pedagogy, and arts management.

37 Woll, *Black Musical Theatre*, xii.

38 Harold Wheeler won a Lifetime Achievement Tony Award in 2019.

39 Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 563–64.

40 Henry T. Sampson writes mournfully of "the demise of the black producer," observing that: "By the early 1930s, almost all of the black musical comedy shows that played on Broadway were produced by whites. . . . By the mid-1930s, musical comedy shows and revues produced by, owned by, and performed by blacks were well on the road to decline." See Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 35.

41 Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth Wollman have critiqued the indiscriminate use of the term "Golden Age" in musical theatre studies, highlighting its inconsistencies and the way it seems to devalue what transpired in its wake. I find these critiques compelling yet would also note that it

remains in wide use among practitioners and musical theatre training programs, where the requirement to have "Golden Age" song repertoire in one's book still stands. Additionally, it seems a bit unjust to me that we would entirely dispense with the term and the prestige it carries without having first allowed black women artists to share in some of that prestige. At the same time, remembering Moten's injunction to avoid the simple aim of seeking honor for black artists, perhaps the fact that so few black artists are recognized as shaping Broadway's golden heyday should form a greater part of the critique for jettisoning the moniker. See Sternfeld and Wollman, "After the Golden Age," 111–24.

42 Perhaps this is part of why musical theatre fans can be so fiercely insistent, to the point of delusion, in denying the various racisms in many "great shows"—out of a fear that the beloved art object will be excised from the canon.

43 Possible exceptions include Ethel Waters and Audra McDonald.

44 My intent is not to reify the awards ceremony in an act of unreserved endorsement. However, assembling the list of black women who were the first to win Tony Awards for performances in musical theatre provides one means of tracking and listening to those whose performances, even if largely forgotten today, were deemed outstanding in their own time.

45 This project stands in conversation with works by Christine Bacareza Balance, *Tropical Renditions*; Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls*; Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent* and *Liner Notes for the Revolution*; Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery* and "When Malindy Sings"; Shana Redmond, *Anthem*; Elena Elias Krell, "Contours through Covers," 476–503; Licia Fiol-Matta, *The Great Woman Singer*; Tavia Nyong'o, "Afro-Philo-Sonic Fictions," 173–79; Alexandra T. Vazquez, *Listening in Detail*; and Shane Vogel, "Performing 'Stormy Weather,'" 93–113, and *Stolen Time*.

46 Moten, *In the Break*; Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*.

47 Kajikawa, "Leaders of the New School?" 45.

48 Johnson, "Building the Broadway Voice"; Macpherson, "Sing"; Wollman, *The Theater Will Rock*.

49 Stacy Wolf's analysis of *West Side Story*'s "A Boy Like That," the iconic duet between ingénue Maria and secondary lead Anita, can be extended by a deeper consideration of vocal sound. Beyond the dramatic or the compositional, an attention to the sound of singers' voices has much to add to the analysis. Noting that Anita is an alto and Maria is a soprano is not precisely sufficient and may in fact be a bit misleading. These descriptions of vocal range, or *fach*, are drawn from the classical world and of limited use in the musical theatre context. More specifically, Maria's classical, lyrically written sound brings the value system of the composer and casting director to bear on her character as more European and evolved,

where Anita's low-to-the-ground belt voice carries the legacy of the blues shouters and a host of ideas around the earthiness (or "fieriness") and pragmatism of women whose voices sound like that. Here audiences are presented with two kinds of Puerto Ricanness and two kinds of femininity, and the fact that both resolve in tragedy by the show's end seems to foreclose a field of vocal possibility. Yet even within the tight spaces of such sonic parameters, one can listen in detail for the ways that singers of color move through sound to execute choices about the musical-theatrical vocal-possible. This attention to technical practice brings into hearing further dimensions of what a voice—and a dramatic character—is, means, and does in full potentiality.

The casting of white actress Carol Lawrence as ingénue Maria, and Puerto Rican actress Chita Rivera as Anita in the original Broadway production of *West Side Story* in 1957 has much to do with the vocal sound the producers wanted for each character. The implication is that the idealized Puerto Rican woman, love interest for white American male lead Tony, had a voice that could be performed only by a white singer. Additionally, I must note that triple threat Broadway legend Chita Rivera's *vocal* performances, although beyond the scope of this book, deserve greater scholarly consideration. As a Tony Award–winning woman of color star from Broadway's "Golden Age" who sustained a remarkable career on Broadway over six decades, Rivera's performances stand in conversation with African American and Asian American artists like Diahann Carroll, Pat Suzuki, and Leslie Uggams, whose Broadway careers were, by comparison, much more short-lived.

50 A key aim of the book is to unsettle ideas of history and genre as stable, fixed entities, and to point up the ways that historical sound travels—often across musical genres—in vocal practice, including in contemporary practice. Alexandra T. Vazquez's approach to writing on Cuban popular music via detailed, interruptive "interaction" rather than "account" is instructive here. See Vazquez, *Listening in Detail*, 8.

51 The bird with an egg in its beak that reaches back toward the feathers it already carries is not engaging a distant, externalized past but an embodied reality, a "behindness" that is already part of its corporeal being. For more on sankofa and theatre practice, see Yeboah, "All the Nation's a Stage," 147–68.

52 Davis, "The Context Problem," 208.

53 My upbringing in central Pennsylvania has connected me to a line of voice teachers that traces directly to Jo Estill, founder of the Estill pedagogical model. Specifically, Kimberly Steinhauer, president of Estill Voice International and director of the Estill workshop in Quebec City, which I discuss in chapter 4, grew up in a town only twelve miles from my hometown of State College, Pennsylvania. Steinhauer's high school choir director,

Jessica McNall, taught throughout the central Pennsylvania region and led a local children's choir I sang in when I was five years old, where she taught warm-ups and vocalizations from the Estill method that I remember today; McNall later came to teach at my high school, where I studied with her and served as a piano accompanist for her private voice teaching practice. McNall was a student of Jo Estill's at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1980s and traveled internationally with Estill leading workshops of her method. For these reasons, my Pennsylvania roots and lineage of voice study grant me a particular insider access to this method and its teachers that I acknowledge and benefit from as I engage the theoretical implications of singing practice.

54 Steinhauer, "Estill Workshop (Level Two)"; Sussuma, "Estill Workshop (Level Two), 'Figuring Out the Figures." Since the time of this workshop, Sussuma has parted ways with the Estill orthodoxy and continues teaching voice in a personalized method that also draws on his training as a certified Feldenkrais® practitioner.

55 This approach to listening has points of intersection with the materialisms proposed by feminist scholars, and elucidated for the voice by Nina Eidsheim, in which perception determines and coconstitutes reality. Deborah Kapchan's work on the sound body as porous and in the process of transformation—a context in which music functions as just one of the "prostheses and technologies that extend the body"—is also relevant here. See Kapchan, "Body," 39.

56 Ahrens, ASCAP/Disney Musical Theatre Writing Workshop.

57 McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*.

58 These are as follows: chapter 1: "Poor Man's Blues" (Bessie Smith); "Don't Fish in My Sea" (Ma Rainey and another interlocutor, possibly Bessie Smith); "The International Rag" (Sophie Tucker); "The Bully Song" (May Irwin); "St. Louis Blues" (Ethel Waters); and "I Got Rhythm" from the musical *Girl Crazy* (Ethel Merman). In chapter 2: "Stormy Weather" (Ethel Waters); "Supper Time" from *As Thousands Cheer* (Ethel Waters); "Bali H'ai" from *South Pacific* (Juanita Hall); "So Long, Dearie" from *Hello, Dolly!* (Pearl Bailey); and "Tired" (Pearl Bailey). In chapter 3: "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" from *Show Boat* (Lena Horne); "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" from *Leave It to Me* (Mary Martin); "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair" from *South Pacific* (Mary Martin); "A Sleepin' Bee" from *House of Flowers* (Diahann Carroll); "My Own Morning" from *Hallelujah, Baby!* (Leslie Uggams); "Being Good Isn't Good Enough" from *Hallelujah, Baby!* (Leslie Uggams); "I Enjoy Being a Girl" from *Flower Drum Song* (Pat Suzuki); "Bal Petit Bal" from *Leonard Sillman's New Faces of 1952* (Eartha Kitt); and "Cheerio, My Deario (Toujours Gai)" from *Shinbone Alley* (Eartha Kitt).

59 For more on the way that singing voices function technically in relation to songwriting practice, see Asare, "The Singing Voice." I must also note that in the musical theatre we cannot speak of a vocal performer's "interpreta-

tion" in quite the same terms as is often the case with other genres of recorded popular song. Here, musical choices such as phrasing must also be understood as acting choices, interpretation that is in service of character.

60 Musical theatre performers often speak of the songs in their repertoire and in the binder they carry to auditions as songs that are in their "book."

Chapter 1: Vocal Color in Blue

1 Miller, *Place for Us*, 108.

2 On the "twice-behaved" nature of performance, see Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*.

3 On this point, Eidsheim writes: "By shifting our assumption of the singer from pure producer to producer and listener, we can recognize that he or she is listening to and also assigning meaning to or withholding it from a given labeling of his or her vocal timbre." Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 180.

4 Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*.

5 Herrera, Marshall, and McMahon, "Sound Acts."

6 On black women classical singers and their training, see Story, *And So I Sing*; and Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*.

7 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 30, 32. Taylor posits the "scenario" as a unit of the repertoire that effects a "once-againness" and stages "the generative critical distance between social actor and character."

8 Work, *American Negro Songs*, 32.

9 Lott, *Love and Theft*, 53.

10 Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 14.

11 Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 14–15.

12 At the same time I do not want to dismiss the very real ways that the contributions of black musicians have been systematically erased in histories of popular and recorded music. See for example Maultsby, "The Politics of Race Erasure in Defining Black Popular Music Origins," 61–79.

13 Work, *American Negro Songs*, 29.

14 Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, 122.

15 Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," 508.

16 Connor, *Beyond Words*, 28.

17 Moten, *In the Break*, 107.

18 Waters and Samuels, *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*, 91.

19 Albertson, *Bessie*, 14.

20 McGinley, *Staging the Blues*.

21 Daphne Brooks has pointed up the fact that present-day listeners are trained by television reality shows to exercise a certain vigilance against supposed intonation problems, standing ready to apply the damning critique of "pitchy-ness" to singers whose performance disappoints. See Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?'" 617–27.