

Charlatans and Quacks: Motivation for NATS's Creation

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prov·e·nance (prŏv'ə-nəns) *n.* Place of origin, source. [LAT. *Provenire*, to originate.]

Charlatan (noun)

char·la·tan | \ 'shar-lə-tən \

1: QUACK

2: one making usually showy pretenses to knowledge or ability:
FRAUD, FAKER¹

IN 1915, W. WARREN SHAW WAS not fearful of sharing his beliefs concerning charlatans in the field of the teaching of singing: “Charlatanism seems to be more rampant in the vocal field than in any other field of art. The sheep are plentiful and the shearers unscrupulous. Witness the hopeless vocal condition of the many would-be singers who have spent time and money unsparingly in their efforts to accomplish. While it is true that there are causes of failure other than the wrong vocal instruction, yet there can be little doubt that this is the chief cause of very many vocal failures.”²

The wide-spread, systematic profiteering by inadequate teachers of singing was prolific in the late 1800s and early 1900s. With the lack of any existing accreditation entity at the time, students were often left to their own devices when selecting a voice instructor. The existence of charlatanism in the teaching of singing was well known, and literature from that time period demonstrates the frustration of the qualified teacher of singing and their desire to put an end to the distressing practice.

Imagine another girl who has been studying for years at great sacrifices to her family. You see the temperament in her face and hear it in her voice when she speaks, and you feel certain that she can learn quickly what to do. She gets up to sing. You find that some charlatan has been taking her money for years and telling her she has a great future—just a plain jolly and that she has not the voice or, if she has, it has been trained so badly she cannot use it.³

The unfortunate part is that as soon as one charlatan has been exposed there is usually another to take his place, and thus the musical public is continually exposed to deception and fraud. There are, however, many excellent teachers, and it is not difficult to locate them by their pupils.⁴

The word quack was originally applied to charlatans and swindlers who went about “quacking” like geese about qualifications and attributes they could not possibly possess. In all branches of professional work “quacks” exist, but the

number in music exceeds all other professions, since no legal safeguards are thrown about those who would patronize the music teacher. Music teaching is an art, and it has been found impractical to license those who follow an art in the manner in which a physician, an engineer or a lawyer is accredited. For this reason the matter of the selection of a teacher becomes especially difficult and exceptionally important. There are more “quacks” in the ranks of vocal teachers than in any other artistic profession.⁵

In 1892, Emílio Belari went further in writing a book entitled *Vocal Teaching is a Fraud* where he created a list of attributes that could be found in a charlatan’s vocal studio.

As a general rule, then, without exception, we should consider as incompetent:

- I.—Those who claim to teach by the pure ancient Italian method.
- II.—Those who proclaim a special method of their own.
- III.—Those who defend and preach the excellencies of absurd monstrosities such as the aberrations of Wartel of Paris, the so-called method of singing with the mouth closed, imported into America by Mme. Rudersdorf.
- IV.—Those who attribute the control of the breath to the false vocal cords and consider them the culminating point in education.
- V.—Those who found the whole system on “the art of breathing.”
- VI.—Those who give rules for breathing contrary to the natural mechanism employed from the moment we enter this world until the instant we leave this life.
- VII.—Those who say, according to old theories, that registers do not exist.
- VIII.—Those who, without exactly understanding the voice, admit of the existence of but two registers.
- IX.—Those who from the beginning give the pupil a large volume of vocalizes [*sic*], have him sing them in rhythm and always with the vowel A (ah).
- X.—Those who in order to prepare the voice to sing, begin with the first lesson to swell the tones.
- XI.—Those who without any preparation whatever give pieces from the first day.
- XII.—Those who have no voice and cannot themselves sing, thus pretending to teach others what they cannot themselves do.
- XIII.—Those who having a defective voice pretend to perfect other voices, when they have not been able to perfect their own.
- XIV.—Those who, having a beautiful voice and singing well, have not made other studies of the voice except those they needed exclusively to perfect their own.⁶

In 1882, the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) was created in the United Kingdom with the goal of promoting music and protecting the rights of those working in the profession. The April 1905 issue of *The Etude Magazine* emphasized the importance of this organization.

The society (ICS) is now in the twenty-second year of its growth. The intelligence and care with which the work of organization has been carried forward has resulted, not only in securing for its members an unquestioned standing, but for the public, protection from incompetents and charlatans.⁷

The ISM was not alone in their desire to rid the populace of inadequate teachers in music. From its earliest inception, our organization (now known as the National Association of Teachers of Singing) has maintained a strict devotion to establishing and maintaining standards for professional teachers of singing.

In 1907, Herman Klein was representing our newly formed Association at the Annual Musical Teachers National Association when he stated:

We hear a great deal from all sides of what the average singing teacher is not—less, perhaps than we should, of what he actually is and less still of what he might. Take him for all in all, he had a poor reputation in the country—so poor, in fact, that if the police acted literally on the principal [*sic*] of give a vocal teacher a bad name and hang him, there would ensure a considerable reduction in the musical population of our large cities.

I am not here today to defend teachers of singing as a body, for the simple and sufficient reason that there is no body yet to defend. If I am called upon for any kind of defense at all, it is in behalf of a small and modest but compact section of singing teachers, who realize, like Marcellus in *Hamlet* that there is something rotten in the State, and are at the present time earnestly and anxiously devising plans whereby to purify and systematize the work of our profession as a whole.⁸

Many ideas concerning how to accredit teachers of singing were discussed in the following years with most being either too rigid or not rigid enough. Relatively early in its history, the Association published the findings of the Committee on Basic Fundamental Requirements for Teachers of Singing.⁹ The work created by this committee was to be the first widely agreed

upon standards accepted by the Association. I present the recommendations by the committee here in full.

BASIC FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TEACHERS OF SINGING

(Note): This preliminary report is herewith submitted by the Committee on Basic Fundamental Requirements for Teachers of Singing to the members for their comment and any suggestions for revision.

At the last meeting of the Eastern District of the National Association, held in New York City, the following motion was voted upon affirmatively by the members present: "It is recommended that the president of the association, with the approval of the executive board, appoint a committee from the National Association to make a thorough study of the basic fundamental requirements for a person who is preparing to enter the singing teaching profession. This study would form the basis of future steps to be taken by the National Association to improve the quality and the prestige of the teacher of singing."

Carrying out this recommendation, President Carson appointed a committee consisting of Ruth Douglass, Victor A. Fields, Sonia Sharnova, Bernard U. Taylor, with Edward Harris as chairman, and the President, *ex officio*.

After considerable discussion and study, the committee is unanimously of the opinion that two equally important obligations rest with the National Association: First, to develop a comprehensive curriculum for the upcoming generation of teachers of singing to improve their knowledge and training, and to make available to them the latest findings in vocal science research and the art of singing.

This report, therefore, will consist of two parts, the first of which will consider in some detail a proposed curriculum for prospective teachers, and the second of which will offer a proposed educational extension program for the benefit of presently active teachers.

PART I

The committee believes that universities and schools of music should be encouraged to develop special courses for the training of prospective teachers of singing, and that the curriculum should consist of the following basic courses:

1. Grounding in Musical Fundamentals. The prospective vocal teacher should first have a thorough foundation in musical fundamentals. This grounding should correspond to the training gained in a four year undergraduate course in a music conservatory or the music department of a university, or its equivalent, and should include a working knowledge of at least two foreign languages. Such a course would correspond to the pre-professional undergraduate pre-medic course of a doctor, the pre-professional course of a lawyer before entering law school.

Upon completion of this foundation in musical fundamentals, the prospective teacher should pursue the following specialized graduate curriculum:
2. Anatomy and Physiology of the Vocal Tract—an orientation. This would be a study of the anatomical structure and muscular functioning of the various component parts of the vocal tract.
3. Physics and Acoustics of Musical Sound—an orientation. This would include a study of physics and acoustics as related to musical sounds, including a consideration of the various types of vibrators and resonators of musical instruments and of the human voice.
4. Psychology for Voice Teachers. Pedagogical considerations of psychology—basic principles—modern theories and schools of thought.
5. Declamation and Oral Interpretation. This would be for the purpose of training prospective vocal teachers to use their speaking voices for purposes of expressiveness and interpretation; to create speech moods—sorrow, joy, dramatic utterance, etc.
6. Terminology. Equipping the prospective teacher with a basic vocabulary in physics, physiology, music, singing and pedagogy.
7. Vocal Methodology and Pedagogy. While no standard teaching methods can be insisted upon in the present phase of voice education, prospective teachers should be instructed in the various schools of thought presently existing insofar as methods of teaching voice are concerned. A discussion of basic principles of the art of teaching including observation of voice teachers, studio practices and devices, group instruction, etc.
8. Vocal Repertory. A course developed with the special needs of the prospective teacher in mind,

including study of vocal music suited to the various types of voices, and study of the various types of musical styles—oratorio, Lieder, classic period, different operatic styles, etc.

9. Ethics of the Vocal Profession. A presentation of the ethics and practices of the voice teaching profession. For the future maintenance of the highest ethical standards in the profession, it is important to impress these principles upon the future teacher.
10. History of the Vocal Art.
11. Vocal Training, including Diction. Prospective teachers, whether professional singers or not, should continue the improvement of their own vocal performance.
12. Advanced General Musicianship. This course would be concerned mostly with non-vocal music. Too many singers and teachers are not conversant enough with the wide musical field. They confine their musical interests too closely to their own specialized field. Instrumentalists would do well to know more about singing; singers and singing teachers would be broadened and developed if they knew more about instrumental music and other aspects of general musical culture.
13. Vocal Clinic. A period of internship [*sic*] during which the advanced student would have an opportunity to observe, analyze and study the vocal problems of practicing professional singers and teachers of singing.
14. Practice Teaching under Expert Guidance. Before beginning the independent practice of teaching, the prospective teacher should have had a certain number of hours of actual vocal teaching under the supervision of experts.

In concluding this section of the report, a few general observations might be made.

Without further study and consultation with educational authorities it would be impractical to try to estimate the time that the outlined special course might take. However, the committee believes that it might be possible to complete such study in a period of two years.

Furthermore, the committee is aware that in putting such a program into action, some revision of the curriculum might be found necessary. Also, the committee realizes that some of the subjects, such as vocal terminology, are relatively new, and the Association

might have to take the lead in developing commonly accepted standards so that the teaching of them might be made possible.

However, the committee firmly believes that while some problems might arise in carrying out such a program, the problems would be capable of solution.

PART II

To achieve the second purpose of the committee, it is recommended that each district of the association create its own educational extension program along the following lines:

1. During each year a series of lectures could be given on
 - a) Anatomy and Physiology of the Vocal Tract by reputable medical authorities.
 - b) Physics and Acoustics of Musical Sound by the best available authorities in the field of science.
 - c) Psychology for Voice Teachers by the best available specialists in the field of educational psychology in the district.
 - d) Vocal Repertory by the best qualified members in the district. These lectures should conform as much as possible with the general purposes outlined in the curriculum given in section one.
2. If the proper facilities are available, lectures and demonstrations might be given in Declamation and Oral Interpretation.
3. Each district could organize a series of vocal clinics and arrange for observation of vocal lessons and studio demonstrations by various members of the district.
4. In order to make it possible to give collective study and have collective discussion of the subject of the Ethics of the Vocal Profession, it is recommended that a national committee be appointed to submit a report on the subject. After such a report were available, in each district a member could be appointed who would use the report as a basis for lecture material and discussion.
5. To present lectures on the History of the Vocal Art, a member from each district might be appointed to study the large literature on the subject and present it in lecture form.

The committee is of the opinion that the expense of the execution of this program should be borne by those registering for the lectures and discussions, and that the

extension program should be made available to all reputable voice teachers whether or not they are members of the National Association.

The committee has not presented this extension program in as much detail as the curriculum outlined in section one, since it realizes that each district must be left free to develop the program according to its own particular conditions existing in the district. However, the committee feels that the development of this program is of the greatest importance to the singing profession. Were such a program put into action, it would have a most stimulating and inspiring influence on the profession, and the committee believes it would be welcomed by all forward-looking members of the profession.

With the submission of this report, the work of this committee is not completed. At some future time, ways and means should be studied for the improvement of the standard of vocal teaching in centers that are not large enough to carry out the programs outlined here. However, the committee feels that it has given careful thought to the two most important phases of the subject it was asked to study.

One final comment might be made. In the committee's discussions, a remarkable degree of unanimity of thought prevailed. It may be significant that six active members of the profession were in such basic agreement on the matters outlined here.

Respectfully submitted, EDWARD HARRIS,
Chairman, December 17, 1947.

NOTES

1. Alan Brinkley, "Charlatan." *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (n.d.); <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charlatan?src=search-dict-box> (accessed April 25, 2019).
2. W. Warren Shaw, "Department for Singers: The Incompetent Voice Teacher," *The Etude Magazine* 33, no. 6 (July 1915): 527.
3. F. W. Wodell, "Vocal Department," *The Etude Magazine* 25, no. 12, (December 1907): 816.
4. Corinne Rider-Kelsey, "Why American Girls Succeed in Opera," *The Etude Magazine* 27, no. 7 (July 1909): 451.
5. Dayton Wegefarth, "The Great Danger in 'Quack' Vocal Teachers," *The Etude Magazine* 29, no. 3 (March 1911): 197.
6. Emilio Belari, *Vocal Teaching is a Fraud* (New York: M. M. Hernandez, 1892), 8–10.
7. H. W. Greene, "Vocal Department," *The Etude Magazine* 23, no. 4 (April 1905): 155.
8. Harvey Ringel, *History of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* (Jacksonville, FL: National Association of Teachers of Singing, 1990), 1.
9. Earl Harris, "Basic Fundamental Requirements for Teachers of Singing," *The Bulletin* IV, no. 4 (February–March, 1948): 1, 7.

Dr. Kimberly Broadwater serves as an Associate Professor of Music at Mississippi Valley State University and as Music Coordinator. Dr. Broadwater teaches private voice lessons, Vocal Pedagogy, Diction, and Class Voice. She serves as the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Mississippi Valley State University, is an active performer, and presents workshops and master classes.

As a researcher, Dr. Broadwater maintains an active pursuit of new data and historical information. Among her accomplishments are the following presentations: "The Effects of Singing on Blood Pressure in Classically Trained Singers" at the 26th Annual Care of the Professional Voice Symposium, "Video Conferencing in the Voice Studio: Is the Technology There?" at the Pacific Voice and Speech Foundation and UCLA Voice Center for Medicine and the Arts Voice Conference, and "Environmental versus Biological Effects of the Human Voice" at the Care of the Professional Voice 36th Annual Symposium.

Hailed as a singing actress, Dr. Broadwater has performed in operas, oratorios, symphonic literature, and in recital. She has performed the roles of the Third Lady, *The Magic Flute* (Mozart); Dame Quickly, *Falstaff* (Verdi); Augusta, *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (Moore); Hata, *The Bartered Bride* (Smetena); Gil, *The Shepard's Story* (Caudill, World Premiere); Susanna, *The Secret of Susanna* (Wolf-Ferrari); Miss Todd, *Old Maid and the Thief* (Menotti); Terentia, *Captain Lovelock* (Duke); and First Knitter, *A Game of Chance* (Barab). Additionally, Dr. Broadwater has performed in *Gloria* (Vivaldi), *Messiah* (Handel), *Marcha de Galvez* (Constantinides), *Lord Nelson Mass* (Haydn), *Three Japanese Dances* (Rogers), *Missa brevis in F* (Mozart), and *Requiem* (Mozart).

Dr. Broadwater maintains memberships with the National Association of Teachers of Singing, Mu Phi Epsilon-Professional Music Fraternity, and Pi Kappa Lambda-Professional Music Honor Society.

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