

# VoCon

*Report on the VoCon meeting at The Pop and Jazz Platform Meeting 2020 (PJP)  
KASK e3 Conservatorium / School of Arts, Gent (Belgium), 6-9 February*

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## Preamble

VoCon is a European wide platform for vocal Jazz and Pop (J&P) teachers in higher education. It provides the need for sharing good practice and thoughts on J&P education, share differences in vision and mission in the various European countries.

It is a very personal practice based platform that wants to connect professional teachers in higher education on a “person to person” base. It is a learning community, practicing what it preaches and also provides and protects free space for sharing topics that emerge on the spot.

It was originally initiated by Maria Pia De Vito (Conservatorio di Musica “Domenico Cimarosa”, Avellino – Italy), former member of the PJP preparatory working group, together with Annemarie Maas (HKU, Utrecht – The Netherlands) and Anders Ørsager (RMC, Copenhagen – Denmark).

VoCon intends to continue planning meetings during the yearly conference of the AEC Pop and Jazz Platform (PJP) that takes place throughout Europe in one of the AEC connected institutes.□

The consistency of the VoCon group meeting within these AEC/PJP conferences will vary and depend on the location of the conference. Therefore the meetings at these conferences can always be characterized as “open space” and “getting to know each other”. The meetings are the life portal to the (online) learning community that VoCon would like to become.□

In real life, besides the meetings during official AEC/PJP conferences, VoCon enhances their members to meet unofficially in between AEC/PJP meetings during the year. These meetings can take place in small groups and may depend on special topics, brought in by one of the members. It is up to the members to enthuse their own institute to invest in small initiatives like this.

VoCon can be a self-regulating learning community and it is our deepest wish for VoCon to become such an organic movement that every member feels ownership and can and will show initiative where needed in (conference) meetings.

As we speak the core group consists of six members – Teresa Luján Montoya (Conservatorio Superior de Música de Navarra, Pamplona – Spain), Anders Ørsager (RMC, Copenhagen – Denmark), Marta Raviglia (Conservatorio di Musica “Girolamo Frescobaldi”, Ferrara – Italy and Siena Jazz University, Siena – Italy, also contact person for VoCon), Jenny Robson (Sibelius Academy, Helsinki – Finland), Susanna Stivali (Conservatorio di Musica “Licinio Refice”, Frosinone – Italy), Brian Zalmijn (former voice teacher at Codarts, Rotterdam – The Netherlands and Berklee School of Music, Valencia - Spain).

The core group runs a closed *Facebook* page, connects via e-mail and on-line meetings and collects topics for discussion.

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## Vocal Teachers (VoCon) Manifest

When being a member of VoCon you are:

- a vocal teacher (Jazz, Pop, Folk) in higher education;□
- in an institute that is connected to or open to attending AEC/PJP;□
- eager to meet and greet European colleagues in our working field;□
- interested in sharing thoughts, vision, mission and practical working forms with colleagues;□
- primarily interested in sharing questions instead of giving answers;□
- part of a learning community, open to shift angles that may offer new insights;□
- critical friend to your colleagues and their contribution in both meetings and VoCon online communication;□
- part of a non-strategic platform, that develops from the inside out;□
- open to sharing research results, contribute knowledge and be a sounding board;□
- open to educational experiment and keen on exchanging all kinds of educational experiences;□
- an ambassador that reaches out to colleagues inviting them to take part in VoCon.

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Gent (Belgium), February 9th, 2020 – 09:00am-01:00pm, Club Telex

Marta Raviglia (VoCon contact person), with the help of Paulina Gut (AEC Events Manager) and Peter Lesage (KASK & Conservatorium / School of Arts, Gent), contributed to the organization of the Gent meeting.

The meeting consisted of almost fifty people (VoCon members and students), coming from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey.

After a brief introduction, the meeting started with a powerful concert by The Vocal Band, a student vocal ensemble coordinated by Anu Junnonen. Junnonen was invited to join VoCon as a representative of *KASK & Conservatorium / School of Arts* voice department and, after the concert, she talked about her musical background and about her studies, but also about her approach to teaching – this is why she stressed the importance of both of a cappella singing and strong rhythmic phrasing to gain independence from the rhythm section. In addition, she explained that, with her students, she always finds very useful working on the awareness of sound and the connection both with themselves and with the audience.

Then the open floor session started with a presentation by Ineke Vandoorn entitled *Vocal Improvisation, a Horizontal Approach*. Vandoorn realized that most jazz singers sound the same when it comes to improvisation as if being a singer, with all the peculiarities and wonders of the instrument we carry, it is not enough to be considered a skilled musician and something more is needed. Vandoorn pointed out that the majority of books on vocal improvisation are written by instrumentalists that also sing and their point of view is quite limited because the voice is a multidimensional instrument and should not be treated like any other instrument.

The second contribution came by Susanne Rosenberg (*Heartbeat & Breathe, Finding the Folk Singing Style*). Rosenberg talked about her research on Folk singing techniques and, more specifically, about *kulning*, a traditional Swedish call for the cows and the way this techniques are

still evolving since they are nowadays used in musical contexts very far from the circumstances that originally generated them.

Then it was Jenny Robson's turn with a presentation entitled *Challenges in Vocal Improvisation in Be Bop Idiom*. Robson had the opportunity to study idiomatic improvisation during her doctoral studies and among the different styles in jazz improvisation she investigated on, the bebop style still seems to be very challenging, both for professional singers and students, because of the virtuosity and musical knowledge it requires. Robson reached a turning point in her research not only when she started transcribing be-bop solos by singers and instrumentalist, but also when she started transcribing her own recorded solos.

After the break, in the second part of the morning, Michela Lombardi introduced the audience to a series of classic jazz vocal exercises by Judy Niemack and Bob Stoloff she put some lyrics to – this technique allows students to be more fluent with swing phrasing and with memorizing difficult patterns.

The last open floor session was led by Susanna Mesiä (*Vocal One-to-One Teaching as a Learner-Centered Practice – Practical Ideas*). Mesiä presented the practical part of her doctoral reaseach and demonstrated her personal approach to teaching with a student. The student sang a complex song she would like to improve on and, with the help of Mesiä, she could understand what were the technical issues she needed to work on.

The meeting was extremely successful and VoCon, for the very first time, could reach a broader audience. It ended with a very short open discussion where most of the participants shared thoughts and ideas.

Looking forward to next AEC/PJP MEETING in Lodz (Poland), February 2021.

July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Best regards,  
Marta Raviglia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marta Raviglia', written in a cursive style.