

IN MEMORIAM

STEVEN MACGREGOR DEMOREST (1959-2019)

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STEVEN DEMOREST, AS BOTH A SCHOLAR AND a singer, had a voice that was strong and resonant. Steve's passion for singing grew as an undergraduate in the Luther College choirs under the inspiring direction of Weston Noble, as a graduate student at Westminster Choir College, and through his doctoral work at the University of Wisconsin, where he encountered the choral artistry of Robert Fountain. His value for and pursuit of rigorous research and musical accomplishment—pairing the two while maintaining the integrity of each—characterized his contribution to the fields of choral music, music education, and music psychology. Rather than viewing musical excellence as exclusive, Steve saw musical achievement as something everyone could and should experience. He also believed that those responsible for guiding such experiences should be skilled as musicians and as teachers. Through a career that began at the University of North Texas, then at the University of Washington, and finally at Northwestern University, Steve worked tirelessly to bring about the best in music-making and music teaching.

Steve did not constrain his research to a single discipline or audience, but posed questions across boundaries and categories. For example, though initially studying singing development in adolescents (Demorest & Clements, 2007), he expanded this work to include children (Demorest, Nichols, & Pfordresher, 2017) and adults (Demorest & Pfordresher, 2015). He found that cognitive aspects of singing, like many learned abilities, were not stable but declined over time if not maintained, thus documenting that singing experience represented a central factor in singing accuracy. Addressing both pedagogy and learning processes, he worked to develop tools for assessing pitch matching and song singing including comparisons of acoustic scoring to expert judgement (highly correlated), and encouraged work by others on the psychometrics of singing assessment, including concerns of validity and reliability.



After a singing research symposium he convened in Seattle in 2013, Steve and his colleagues introduced the Seattle Singing Accuracy Protocol (Pfordresher et al., 2015), a pioneering online assessment tool that automated collection of singing data.

If certain musical skills required exercise to be maintained, rather than deteriorate with neglect, and knowing adults often expressed regret later in life for not participating more in music, Steve realized the need for a thorough understanding of why adolescents join and continue to participate in music. He found school music participation could be predicted to a high degree (74%) by family music participation and by participants' own views of themselves as musicians (Demorest, Kelley, & Pfordresher, 2017). This connection between musical self-concept and actual singing ability marked a rich contribution to the understanding of music participation among young people.

Steve was fascinated not only by music production skills, but by perception skills, as well. He viewed the music classroom as a place where all music is welcomed and explored, and asked questions about the ways humans make sense of unfamiliar music, about what happens when music crosses cultural boundaries. In one

of his favorite studies from this line of his research, Steve examined whether either music complexity or participant age was a factor in listeners' apparent memory advantage for culturally familiar music (Morrison, Demorest, & Stambaugh, 2008). Finding that neither factor mitigated what he coined an "enculturation effect"—the cognitive privilege enjoyed by the music rule system in which one grew up—he went on to gather evidence that pointed to patterns of pitch interval and rhythm as the primary sources of culture-based variability in music recognition memory.

Using a computational design that modeled the expectancies of pitch intervals and inter-onset intervals (IOI) occurring within specified music corpora (Pearce & Wiggins, 2012), he and his collaborators proposed the notion of cultural distance, a quantifiable measure describing the degree to which one body of music differs from another (Morrison, Demorest, & Pearce, 2018). Rather than a dichotomous similar/different construct, cultural distance acknowledges the continua along which different music traditions vary through dimensions such as pitch or rhythm. Such a continuous

measure allows for a more fine-grained understanding of interaction between structural aspects of music and corresponding human behaviors. Steve was in the process of testing this construct at the time of his death and this work will continue through his collaborators and students.

With a 30-year record of sustained and substantive scholarly work, Steve found it satisfying that his most widely read article was a recent essay published in *The Conversation* (Demorest, 2017). In it he eschewed the characteristic formality of research reports and made a succinct and plain-spoken case for each individual's innate musicality, the importance of encouraging children's musical curiosity, and the care adults must take with young peoples' musical self-image. With over 300,000 Facebook posts to date, Steve's cautionary words about the talent mindset clearly resonated. It also exemplified his values as a scholar, an educator, and a musician—and, without question, as a father and a deeply compassionate human being—in its application of sound logic and data to teaching practice in the best musical interests of children.

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