

Diastasis Recti and the Postpartum Classical Singer

In July 2020, Dr. Kylie Gougler, with research assistant Dr. Aurora Deeds, began researching diastasis recti (DR), a condition in which the rectus abdominus muscles (RA) elongate and split ipsilaterally, which is then accompanied by the widening and extension of the linea alba (a white fibrous line which runs vertically along the midline of the abdominal wall). DR occurs most often in pregnant and postpartum females.

Singers rely heavily on the expansion and engagement of the rectus abdominus during inhalation and exhalation, but continued and prolonged expansion of RA muscles can reinforce the diastasis (separation) of the abdominal wall. Although DR can never fully heal, the diastasis can be minimized with conditioning of the pelvic floor and core muscles. Though “pelvic floor” and “core” are terms used somewhat loosely, I intend to focus on precise muscles in my research, such as the transverse abdominus and iliopsoas muscles, respectively, to avoid unintended ambiguities.

Scant knowledge exists as to the prevalence or management of the condition, but as singers and voice pedagogues, the importance of understanding DR is invaluable. This presentation will also be important for young singers who may become pregnant while concurrently pursuing a professional singing career. While this research is new and still in the early phases, I hope to be able to present an overview of DR with specific strategies as to how singers or voice teachers can combat the condition in and outside the studio.

Heralded by D Magazine as “continually captivating, sensitive, and vocally magnificent,” Kylie T. Gougler is an Iowa-based singer and pedagogue. She holds the DMA from the University of Iowa, an MM from the University of North Texas, and a BA from Luther College. She has served on the faculties of Clarke University, Waldorf University, and Luther College.

As an advocate for Czech and Slovak opera and art song, Dr. Gougler performed most recently in Náměšť nad Oslavou, Czech Republic, and with the National Czech and Slovak Museum in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In 2011, she won the American semifinals of the Czech and Slovak International Voice Competition and competed in the international finals in Montreal, Quebec. Her dissertation, “Czech Arias for Soprano: An Anthology”, was chosen to be presented at the 55th Annual NATS Convention in Las Vegas, NV.

Dr. Gougler is a recipient of the 2020 NATS Emerging Leader Award.