Sylvia: Inspired by two powerful women, Lizzo and Fobazi Ettarh (E-TAR), we welcome you to our panel, Change the Tempo: Dismantling Vocation Awe in Music Librarianship.
Sylvia: Land Acknowledgement

To begin, we wish to acknowledge this land on which the Music Library Association annual meeting is taking place. For many years it has been the traditional land of the Chesapeake, the Carolina Algonquian, and the Powhatan.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, and recognize their continuing connection to the land, water, and air that we consume.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

We invite you to learn more about the indigenous people of this area by visiting [https://nansemond.org/](https://nansemond.org/).

What is vocational awe?

And how does it manifest?

Sylvia:

Vocational awe refers to the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique.

In the vein of Ettarh’s call to dismantle Vocational Awe we gather today to share how vocational awe has impacted and continues to impact our librarianship.
In her article, Ettarh puts a spotlight on the view of librarianship as a vocation. By examining the underpinnings of this term, she identifies close ties between libraries and the Christian church in their histories, heroic narratives, and architecture.
The early Western bookkeepers, for example, gave their lives to spiritual work in monasteries. Scribes copied and bound manuscripts in scriptoria to preserve and disseminate the liturgy.
We have heroic stories of individuals peppered throughout the histories of both institutions. St. Lawrence, patron saint of librarians, is revered for lying over coals on a gridiron rather than give up the Church archives. More recently, the film, *The Public*, which was released after Ettarh’s article, is a contemporary example of the library depicted as a sanctuary, and its librarians as defenders of the people.
Finally, churches and libraries alike are designed to inspire wonder. In many cases, libraries are even indistinguishable from cathedrals in their architecture. All of these things serve to elicit a sense of awe - a mixed emotion of adoration, fear, and wonder. In addition to shielding the institution of librarianship from criticism, Ettarh argues that this awe becomes a device weaponized against library workers, justifying undercompensation, job creep, burnout, and inequity in the profession through the enforcement of this idea that librarianship is a virtuous calling to serve something greater than the self.

Ettarh’s work resonated with me on separate, interrelated levels of my professional identity – as a librarian and as a musician. It made me wonder how my training in music, which has deeply influenced who I am personally and professionally, informs my work as a librarian.
Music, for starters, is enmeshed in this same narrative. In the same scriptoria, chant was inscribed alongside liturgical text, and music played a significant role in the practice of Christianity, even through the upheaval of the Reformation.
We have the archetype of the Starving/Suffering Artist, popularized by Murger’s Scenes of Bohemian Life, which became the basis for Puccini’s late 19th century opera.
Finally, secular performance spaces echo the magnificence of churches, instilling awe through extravagant architecture. That these components of vocational awe in librarianship are mirrored in music suggests the phenomenon could also be at work in this discipline, constructing a façade around the institution and the roles of those who work in it.

Formal training in music, evidenced by a university degree, is commonly expected for music library positions. If vocational awe is also at play within music, it follows that this places our work at an intersection of disciplines that could be mutually reinforcing harmful narratives, beliefs, and behaviors.

Part of what makes the aforementioned components challenging to address is that they take place at temporal, spatial, and social levels that are difficult to engage with as an individual.
In reflecting on my own experience with vocational awe in music, I’ve been sitting with memories of practicing flute in university, which is where I can first identify experiencing this phenomenon at a personal level.
Practice (v.)

- to pursue or be engaged in (a particular occupation, profession, skill or art)
- to exercise oneself in a skill or art in order to acquire or maintain proficiency, esp. in music
- to observe (a religious duty), to perform (a rite)


Practice can be defined in multiple ways:
- the pursuit of an occupation or profession
- exercise of a skill or art
- observance of religious duties or performance of rites

The difference between practice as skill development and practice as a ritualistic action lies in how it functions in a social context. Ritualistic practice specifically reflects and enforces values and rules of conduct, instilling solidarity in a community. The power of rituals lies in their ambiguity, as their mechanics and effects are difficult to pin down, making them resistant to critique.
### Components of Formal Music Training

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<th>Lessons</th>
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<td>Practice</td>
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All of these components of music training function as ways to build musical skill. They can also function ritualistically. Completing your senior recital, for example, is something of a rite of passage.

Music practice – literally sitting in the practice room practice – functions as skill development AND ritualistically - as performance of one’s dedication to capital M Music. The line between these functionalities is ambiguous and context-dependent – which is why it’s so effective in enforcing vocational awe.
I’ve identified a few facets of music practice that can be seen to function ritualistically. Knowing that this will resonate differently for everyone, I hope it might prompt introspection on the factor of our personal relationships with music/practice as we consider vocational awe as it manifests in music librarianship.

**Repertoire**: In a studio, everyone is trained to practice a standard progression of exercises and repertoire. This indoctrination facilitates membership in the studio as well as the greater music community. Ritualistically, it reinforces the idea that there is one repertoire that holds value. Straying too far from this repertoire can be used to rationalize exclusion from the community.

**Independent work**: In the practice room, there is an internal process of critique (as opposed to external feedback from a teacher). In this space, improvement is a result of isolated work. This makes pragmatic sense – no one can physically make anyone practice. On the other hand, emphasis on this isolated work can give credence to individualizing success and failure; justify narrow, rigid standards; and discount other influential factors.
**Time & effort**: It almost goes without saying that it takes mindful and consistent work to practice well, and a great deal of time. However, this fundamental element of skill development easily becomes a performance in which time and effort spent practicing can serve to demonstrate/prove one's commitment to Music.
I learned through my formal music training that practice required sacrifice – of social life, sleep, and any non-music pursuits. Being in multiple ensembles showed commitment. Unpaid gigs were part of the work.
All time should be filled with practice, and the discomfort commonly recognized as part of growth, transformed into a normalization of pain as part of practicing well.
In terms of how this might play into our work as music librarians:

A **standardized repertoire** reinforces unquestioned dominance and “goodness” of a single brand of knowledge, as well as a narrow path to attaining that knowledge. This can be used as a test of vocational purity, and justifies a closed, exclusive community.

The **independent nature of practice** legitimizes individualizing success/failure in meeting unspoken vocational codes of conduct and qualification.

The **necessity of committing effort and time** easily becomes a performance of dedication, in which unsustainable expectations for commitment of the “whole-self” are upheld, and things like not taking sick days, overcommitting, and working for inadequate compensation are the norm.

The practice of music creates community, built on shared knowledge and
experience. At the surface level, this serves a pragmatic purpose in music librarianship. I believe it can also enforce and rationalize harmful beliefs and behaviors, as well as the exclusion of valuable experience and knowledge. Like Ettarh, I don’t wish to suggest that feeling passion for our work is intrinsically bad. I do think there is value, however, in recognizing the capacity for music (and library) practice to be more than the surface-level act of engaging in a skill or profession, and to ultimately recognize our power and responsibility in shaping our practice to reflect our values.
You might be experiencing vocational awe if:

- Setting boundaries for your practice (music and/or librarianship) makes you feel anxious, guilty, or uncommitted
- You feel a need to perform enthusiastic dedication to your job to others by going above and beyond...all of the time

“Practice does not make perfect, but it makes you into who you are.”

What practices and/or experiences inform your work as a music librarian?
Vocational Awe: Dress and Address

WINSTON BARHAM
MUSIC COLLECTIONS LIBRARIAN
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
I work at a 200-year-old research academy, often called this state's flagship institution... and Tradition is a hallowed word there. Yet in the past 10 years, the University of Virginia has been rapidly diversifying, a reflection of both recruitment strategies and statewide demographic trends. Each of the past several entering classes has been the most diverse class ever in the school's history. Nevertheless, traditions die hard. Speaking as a mid-career librarian at a place pulled in different cultural directions, I want to examine dress and address and how our practices might promote, or inhibit, vocational awe.

(Depicted here are some of my friends from the University Singers. We'll come back to this image.)
Let’s start with a few images of The Library of Yesteryear. Picture yourself ascending a granite staircase in front of this “temple,” then announcing yourself by crossing this vast chamber. You then approach the priest or acolyte behind the “altar” with your humble plea and, if they deem you worthy, that person will disappear into the chambers of knowledge behind the closed doors seen here, and eventually present you with your intellectual quarry.
Though the stacks were opened years ago to patrons, this is still what our main library entry hall looks like, minus the imposing desk-*cum*-barrier.
Here’s another grand space in the library, with portrait of its “patron saint” hung aloft. Notice how everyone, students and faculty, are dressed in this photo. Notice also that the books are **literally in cages**. As of last December, when we held our final party in this space before closing for renovations, this room looked exactly the same.
A few weeks ago, I was invited by several colleagues on the spur of the moment to an informal lunch with a library school student on the job market who was passing through. My three colleagues, all female-identified, have been in their positions from 6 months to 6 years. One of them was dressed noticeably more formally than I'm used to; it came up that she feels the need to dress differently for office days vs. department days, because many graduate students in her departments (and most faculty) are older than she. Naturally I wanted to hear everyone's perspective on attire and dress codes, whether formal, or strongly suggested, or even self-imposed — especially from professional women in libraries. (As a side note, our only “required” uniform is a Library-branded nametag. Henry — pictured here with his dad, our dean — models for the rest of us.)
I went to a townhall meeting with about sixty colleagues present last week. I looked around and didn't see a single necktie, not even on the dean or senior leaders. Two of my colleagues, Robin and Anthony, are seen here at the podium, with its antique titling typeface, modeling what it means to dress well, even if that seems to have a different meaning now than it did in prior eras.
To turn to my other topic, one specific institutional quirk coming from all the 
Tradition at UVA is that you don’t get called “Doctor” unless you carry a 
stethoscope. But many ranking faculty expect Mr/Ms/Mrs, or Professor. That 
defereence was certainly the practice when I entered graduate study in classics 
in the 20th century. In fortunate contrast, the Music Department treats grad 
students from their first day as eventual colleagues and almost aggressively 
insists on first-name basis. And as you might expect, the attire among such 
academics is quite relaxed — although the office manager in the Music 
Department expects her staff to abide by a dress code of sorts.
Questions for reflection or discussion

- Do you follow a code of personal appearance?
- If so, is it formal policy, academy-wide?
- Or is it a more vague set of expectations?
- Or is it self-determined?

Consider the above questions. For instance, I feel very fortunate to be at a station in life and work where I don’t need to think about wearing a coat and tie. And although I didn’t mention performance attire yet, I’m also considering retiring my tuxedo (and not because it doesn’t still fit!). In most formal ensembles, there is still a rigid adherence to a gender binary.
Returning to the University Singers in this context… here they are depicted in both informal and formal uniform. With this visual, I invite you to consider:

● What adjustments might your ensemble directors be willing to make for gender variance?
● What about for injury or disability?
● Pregnancy or religious accommodations?
● How might a dress code reinforce adoration across the academy?

And lastly:

● how do you address your faculty?
● your library colleagues?
● your superiors?

(I won't even mention email etiquette, since email and telephones are for old people now.) But,
you might be experiencing vocational awe if you worry about how you dress and the way you address your fellow citizens of the academy.
Double the Awe: vocational awe in the music library

KATIE BUEHNER
HEAD, RITA BENTON MUSIC LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Please reach out to Katie Beuhner for more information about this part of the panel.
My strange love: or how I learned to stop worrying about forcing all of my interests into one career and fell in love with Music (& Arts) Librarianship

MORGAN DAVIS
MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS LIBRARIAN
WILLIAM AND MARY LIBRARIES

Please reach out to Morgan Davis for more information about this part of the panel.
What the Awe: You’re Just One Credential Away

JOY M. DOAN
HEAD, MARTA & AUSTIN WEEKS MUSIC LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Please reach out to Joy Doan for more information about this part of the panel.
An outsider’s perspective

VAUGHAN HENNE
DIGITAL DESIGN & ACCESS LIBRARIAN
DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Please reach out to Vaughan Hennen for more information about this part of the panel.
Ground Rules for Discussion

● Choose presence – take a break from any technology that’s demanding your attention by silencing it or putting it out of sight
● One speaker at a time – no interrupting
● Make space for each other
  ○ 100% participation, 0% domination
● Seek value, not criticism in difference
  ○ If you must critique, critique the idea and not the person
● Take a souvenir
  ○ Be on the lookout for ideas/concepts that radiate positivity that you can take back with you to your institution
Think & Discuss:

- What practices and/or experiences inform your work as a music librarian?
- Do you follow a dress code, institutional or personal?
- Do your dress codes allow for accommodations?
- Do you worry about what constitutes proper modes of address?
- How do we ensure music libraries are not awe-burdening environments, both for the music librarian and for patrons?
- How can we build a strong mentoring program for early career librarians that encourages specialization in a few areas, as opposed to sophomoric knowledge of the whole?
- How can we discourage overcommitment and encourage healthy boundaries (e.g., work-life balance)?
- How can we advocate for a explicitly transparent promotion process, one in which all candidates know the criteria by which he/she/they will be held accountable?
- Whose voices are heard, privileged and get to define Music Librarianship and what it means to be a music librarian?
- How are we welcoming/recruiting those with interdisciplinary backgrounds into the profession?
- If the definition of a music librarian privileges "a broad musical background" as "essential" how as a profession are we encouraging those coming into the profession to pursue a broad musical background? Further, how as a profession do we define "broad" beyond the western European definition of what “belongs” in music academia?
  - Avoid using the phrase “world music” in your responses, as music outside of the western European tradition is not a monolith.