Perfecting Your Practice: Rehearsal Techniques and Strategies for the Undergraduate Singer

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

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Abstract

Each year, young singers enter colleges and universities with the intent of pursuing degrees in vocal performance, many of whom soon find themselves frustrated and discouraged, as well as at odds with their voice teachers over their failure to practice in such a way as to foster steady progress leading to excellence in their singing. While many of these students possess the innate talent and intellect they need to successfully complete these degree programs, most need help learning how to effectively practice so as to make the most of these gifts, because without effective practice, they will not realize their full potential. *Perfecting Your Practice* seeks to provide undergraduate singers with a body of knowledge about how to approach practicing, create a successful practice environment, wisely budget their practice time, negotiate various challenges in repertoire and vocal health, and prepare for recitals and roles.

While specifically written with the needs and challenges of the undergraduate classical singer in mind, this document may serve as a guide for any singer, at any stage of development, amateur or professional, who wishes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their practice routine. It may serve as a studio manual which teachers can give to their students as supplemental information to their own advice or serve as a text for an undergraduate seminar on navigating a degree in vocal performance.
This document is dedicated to my husband, Dan Whitehead.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: FIRST THINGS FIRST

THE CASE FOR PRACTICING

While few performers would openly deny the need for consistent practice in building technique, learning repertoire, and increasing confidence in the performance of their art, students in music schools and professional performers alike struggle with making the commitment to regular and effective practice time. Our collective lack of practice is often due, in part, to a lack of knowledge about how to do so effectively, the issue this document will primarily seek to address, but it also stems from a lack of knowledge about why practice is important. As a teacher of singing, I have often seen bright students become very frustrated when they understand what I am asking them to do technically and musically but cannot do it on command. Their premise seems to be that if they cognitively grasp what I’m asking them to do in a theoretical sense, then they should be able to immediately do it, without going through the vital process of building it into their bodies. What practice does is make permanent those techniques we build into the body through their consistent application. “Our work habits and attitudes shape us as musicians…I think it helps to think of practicing as programming computer software. Every time we…sing anything, we’re telling our brains, ‘This is how I want to do this every time’….When we correct in an immediate and effective way, our brains think, ‘Oh, that’s how she/he wants it. I’ll do that from now on’.”1 The main case for practicing, then, is the fact that repetition is the key to learning. Continual learning about how we as
individuals best function in the practice room with regard to problem-solving, consistency, and artistic expression will result in successful performing. The confidence to hit the high note, sustain the long phrase, or express a text with intentionality and vulnerability under the revealing lights of the stage is built upon the day-to-day repetition of those elements. This daily work gives us the security of knowing that those things we are asking our bodies to do under the pressure of performance are things we’ve built into our bodies through mindful rehearsal. Keeping our eyes on the prize in this way helps to motivate our practicing, as we realize that continual improvement in our performance will be the result.

This is not to say, however, that the journey itself does not have benefits apart from arrival at the destination of excellence in performance. The principles of consistent practice can result in greater discipline in other areas of life, such as improved problem-solving, greater patience, and fostering the creation of self-esteem that comes from accomplishing even small, daily goals. Seeing our practice efforts as having these kinds of far-reaching effects should be tremendously motivating to us as artists.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

Researcher Leslie Hart, a pioneer in applying neuroscientific research to educational processes, suggests that human beings have the following “three genetically prescribed brain drives” that cause us to learn throughout our lives:

1. Make sense of or “interpret encounters” with the people, places, things, and unfolding events of the perceived “world” and of sensed events inside the body
2. Protection of the person from perceived threats to safety and well being

3. Gain and increase mastery of personal interactions with the people, places, things, and events of the perceived world, including one’s own bodymind

Hart further suggests the following four brain processes that enable one to carry out these three basic drives:

1. Active seeking of sensory input

2. Detecting familiar and unfamiliar patterns within the sensory input, interpreting them, and encoding them in memory

3. Formation, elaboration and selection of bodymind programs for carrying out the three drives

4. “Downshifting” from the current ongoing stream of bodymind programs to protective oneself when safety and wellbeing are threatened.

Hart then posits that “every person’s bodymind receives sensory input, internally processes it, and enacts behavioral expressions that form the ‘scaffolding’ of learning that takes place over a lifetime.” Too often, performers try to proceed directly from step one - “sensory input,” (cognitive grasp of what technical, linguistic, and musical aspects are needed for a particular piece), to step three of Hart’s process- the “behavioral expressions,” i.e., technical, linguistic, and musical mastery, without dealing with step two – “internal processing,” or building these aspects of singing into the mind and body via repetition.
It would be useful at this point to explain Hart’s use of the term “bodymind,” as its definition is highly relevant in understanding why practice is so vital to success in performing. Medical science has abolished the once-accepted idea that the body and mind are completely separate entities, and “the inseparable interfacing of human behavior with the nervous, muscular, circulatory, endocrine, and immune systems is well established.” Coined by Candace Pert, Ph.D., of Georgetown University, the term “bodymind” embodies the idea that physical and psychological processes are unified, a fact which must be clearly understood by those who would seek to become better performers through practice. “All environmental adaptation and learning are carried out by our human bodyminds. All self-expression, therefore, is a manifestation of bodymind processes including, of course, all vocal self-expression in speaking and singing.” What we know about the technique, languages, and musical demands of singing, therefore, we must build systematically into our bodies through practice if we are to accurately demonstrate a practical understanding of these things through successful performing.

Acknowledging the need to “internally process” the “sensory input” we receive about singing, however, is only part of the equation as we consider effective practicing. We must further understand that the means of taking in and processing information varies widely among individuals.

**LEARNING STYLES**

All five senses—taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight—play a part in how we experience our world, and the mastery of the craft of singing is no exception, with several senses simultaneously guiding our progress. The part each sense plays, however, varies
from person to person, and though we function and learn through combined use of our
senses, researchers Brian Tracy and Colin Rose suggest that we each tend to favor
learning through primarily one of three main methods – visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.⁸

The visual learner takes in information primarily through the eye-gate. He or she
tends to think in pictures and probably learns best from visual displays (diagrams, charts,
videos, illustrated textbooks, handouts). In a classroom or lesson setting, this person may
prefer to take notes.⁹ When memorizing and / or performing memorized music, the
visual learner will tend to see the pages in his or her mind as they go by, and repeatedly
looking at a score will be his or her key to learning it. This type of learner will always
need to see the music versus learning it by rote.

The auditory learner takes in information primarily through the ear-gate. He or
she will tend to use listening as his or her primary means of learning music – listening to
recordings of songs he or she is learning, and often recording his or her lessons as well.
For this type of learner, “written information may have little meaning until it is heard.”¹⁰
This person will often benefit from reading text aloud when trying to learn or memorize a
song.

Kinesthetic learners take in information primarily through touch. This means that
in the context of learning music, they will often need to play the notes for themselves on
the piano, as “they seem to have to ‘feel’ the song with their fingers.”¹¹ These learners
may need to incorporate the meter and beat emphasis of a song into their bodies via
tapping their feet or clapping their hands. Because the kinesthetic learner’s approach is
hands-on, touch and body awareness will be very important in mastering technique, and
this type of learner may find the discipline of practice to be particularly challenging, as he or she often becomes distracted by the need for activity and exploration.\textsuperscript{12}

While learner typing is but one method of classifying learning styles, it is a model highly relevant to the discipline of effective practice, which, as we will see throughout this document, must incorporate all three types of learning. It is noteworthy and relevant, too, to briefly examine two other models of classification, as these also aid us in understanding how our psychological makeup guides us in effectively processing information.

**MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES**

Researcher Howard Gardner classifies learners through “multiple intelligences,” suggesting that intelligence is highly personal and cannot be quantified merely by intelligence quotient, but is rather a matter of type. Gardner suggests the following seven “intelligences”: linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and spatial.\textsuperscript{13} Gardner’s model relates well to that of Tracy and Rose. Successful singers will tend to be people with high musical intelligence, with visual learners generally demonstrating spatial intelligence, auditory learners demonstrating linguistic intelligence, and kinesthetic learners demonstrating bodily-kinesthetic intelligences as well.

**MIND STYLES**

Dr. Anthony F. Gregorc posits yet another classification system – that of mind styles which play out in the following four personality types: concrete-sequential,
abstract-sequential, concrete-random, and abstract-random. He defines these types as follows:

“concrete-sequential personalities are systematic in their approach to information and tend to be organized, stable, productive, and perfectionists; abstract-sequential personalities will research information and tend to be precise, conceptual, visionary, and opinionated; concrete-random personalities operate on instinct and tend to be curious, hands-on, impulsive, and impatient; and abstract-random personalities depend on absorption of information and tend to be spontaneous, adaptable, social, and perceptive.”

Gregorc’s theory relates well to the other two. Often, for example, a person with a bent toward visual learning and spatial intelligence may be best classified in Gregorc’s model as “abstract-sequential.” The need to see information on paper is, in effect, a need for sequence – i.e., order and pattern. The ability to visualize information – mentally viewing a score that has been memorized, for example - suggests an ability to function in the abstract.

Some auditory learners may well be classified as abstract-random. Like the visual learner who can see in the abstract, the linguistically and musically intelligent auditory learner can hear in the abstract. Often this type of learner can play the piano by ear, and because he or she is always listening, can be easily distracted by noise, or have a short attention span when it comes to working on a piece, as his or her ear tires of it. These attributes constitute the “random” part of this person’s equation.

The kinesthetic learner, attuned to his or her body, often has a concrete-sequential or concrete-random personality, according to Gregorc’s model. The concrete aspect of either personality, in a kinesthetic learner, is manifest by the need to process through the body –feeling, touching, and experiencing music in a concrete fashion – incorporating
rhythm into the body via tapping, clapping, or swaying. This person may need to touch problem areas his or her teacher has pointed out - stroking the tense jaw, rolling the tight shoulders, or moving while singing to counteract general body tension and locking. Sequential concretes will need to organize all this behavior into a systematic routine – a step-by-step process, while random-concretes will likely be prone to less-structured processing and will “enjoy group discussion, cooperative learning, and multi-sensory experiences.”\textsuperscript{15} He or she will likely prefer “to learn through simulations, discussion-based activities, confluent/ holistic education, and cooperative/ collaborative learning.”\textsuperscript{16}

As singers working toward more effective practicing, perhaps the most important bit of information from Gregorc’s model that we can gain is an understanding of two general principles about concrete and abstract learners. First, random learners are “top-down learners,” who “‘learn best by developing a conceptual framework into which they fit details and specific information’.”\textsuperscript{17} In other words, random learners need to deal with the whole of a piece or problem before they can address specifics. Otherwise, they will feel very overwhelmed and even hopeless. Seeing the whole gives this kind of a learner parameters without which he or she will flounder, and when practicing, this person will need to take some time to explore the whole of a piece, even imperfectly, to get a sense of how to break it down into smaller increments.

Conversely, sequential learners are “bottom-up learners,” who “like to learn individual details and then use a series of steps to gain an overall understanding.”\textsuperscript{18} This person will need to deal with details – translating a piece into International Phonetic Alphabet, for example, or immediately identifying and dealing with difficult passages –
prior to seeing the piece as a whole. The sequential learner will prefer to “put the song together section by section.”¹⁹

IMPLICATIONS

What conclusions, then, can we draw from this brief examination of 3 learning models? First, we must understand that we are all different in how we take in and process information. Therefore, learning, in any context, including that of practicing the art of singing, will look different for each individual. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to learning music and incorporating technique into the body. Secondly, we must understand that we are complex. Rare is the individual who processes information in only one way. We may be bent mostly toward visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning, but effective practice will incorporate all of these means to varying degrees. Finally, while this document will seek to provide tools for setting up effective practice time, we must understand that the goal of establishing practice procedures is not the creation and implementation of a set of inflexible procedures as an end unto themselves. The ultimate proof of whether or not a system of practicing is effective will be its result. The goal for all singers, regardless of personality type and learning style, will be excellence in understanding and in performing the art of singing. In identifying and establishing practice techniques, we must seek to maintain a mental balance between creating routines and allowing ourselves the flexibility to alter those routines to suit our personal needs and makeup.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Leon Thurman and Graham Welch, Bodymind & Voice: Foundations of Voice Education (Minneapolis: The VoiceCare Network, 1997), xii.

Ibid, xi.

Ibid, xii.


Ibid.

Ibid, 204.

Ibid, 205.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid, 205-207.

Ibid, 206.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid, 207.

Ibid.
Chapter 2: BASICS OF PRACTICING

As we have established, due to differences in personality and learning style, no two singers’ practice routines will ever look exactly alike, as they must be tailored to the strengths and personality of the individual. In this chapter, however, we will seek to establish some basic principles and general guidelines for setting up practice routines and procedures.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I PRACTICE?

When you are beginning to learn vocal technique and starting the process of learning music on your own – often at the beginning of a college career, for example – almost daily practice will need to be the rule. It may be useful for you to think of practicing as you might a job, in the sense that it should occur at least five days per week as most full-time employment would. After all, if you are investing the time and finances to train as a singer, practicing is your main job in terms of mastering the art form! When the techniques you are learning are new and unfamiliar, “…what is needed is a daily routine that will lead to the acquisition of technical skills required by the instrument in any kind of appropriate literature.”1 As we will discuss more thoroughly later in this chapter, the amount of time spent every day may vary, but the daily aspect of practice, particularly during the building years of college study, will be crucial to quick mastery of technique.
and to fulfilling the musical requirements mandated by most college voice programs. In the context of degree programs and private voice study alike, you generally get out of these usually expensive experiences exactly what you put into them. It is entirely possible for a student of comparatively average talent and intelligence to eclipse more gifted singers simply by virtue of his or her commitment to the learning process, evidenced by daily application of the techniques he or she is being taught. Said famed baritone Sherrill Milnes, “...I was not the hot talent in high school and college. Other people had better natural sounds. I was the better learner, though. I was a good analyzer.”

Giftedness alone will not be enough to enable you to make it as a professional singer, particularly in a market filled with equally talented singers vying for the same roles. The student who learns the discipline of effective, daily practice during his or her undergraduate and graduate school years will be much better served in the competitive world of professional singing outside of academia. “…the singer is at the service of the public…. So one must study and obtain such a technique that the voice can be put at the service of the character being portrayed. Then the character can come alive without having to say, ‘Oh, heavens, here comes a high C’…or this note, or that passage.”

In addition to building techniques into the body, daily practice keeps singing on your mind, mulling over techniques and music alike. Thus, you establish it as a priority, a crucial step in mastering the art of singing, and this kind of mental prioritization both fosters and results from daily practice. As you progress in technique and the ability to quickly learn music and language and gain a body of performance, practice may become more event-oriented, with daily
practice becoming more sporadic, but certainly as you begin vocal study, practice must be an almost-daily, if not daily, event.

WHERE SHOULD I PRACTICE?

We are creatures of habit, associating behaviors with certain places and vice versa. Practicing is no exception to this rule, and practicing should generally take place in the same space or type of space every day. An appropriate practice space should meet two criteria. **First, it must be private enough for you to feel comfortable singing full-out, not worrying about disturbing or being judged by others.** Good practice, except for occasions when you want to try something out for a friend or two, is best accomplished alone. The nature of effective practice involves a willingness to experiment with new sounds, some of which may be unsuccessful at first. Singers often crack on a note or two during practice, or make some ugly noises while trying to figure out notes at the extremes of their ranges. They sing wrong notes while learning new music. All of these issues are perfectly normal and necessary when learning to sing, but they make most singers uncomfortable if they sense that a roommate or family member is listening. If you live in a house and have a piano or keyboard, this is certainly an acceptable practice space, provided that you have regular time **alone** to work in the space, free of distractions and listeners. The same is true for a church or other community facility, if you are fortunate enough to have daily access and permission to practice there in a private space where you will neither disturb nor be disturbed. Dormitory rooms or apartments are another story, however. When I ask my college students about where they practice, I often get answers
such as, “In my apartment / dorm room. I have a small keyboard there.” Admittedly, practicing in your communal living space may be convenient, particularly if you have access to some type of keyboard, but while this may suffice for short sessions of learning music and checking tempi or note accuracy, it is certainly not ideal for daily, full-out singing. If your roommates are around, you will probably almost involuntarily hold back, and practicing in spaces such as these is disturbing to those in other rooms or apartments as well, which will also factor in to your ability and willingness to fully commit to your sound. The notable exception to this rule is the use of practice rooms, often the only practice space to which a student living on a college campus has access. Practice rooms admittedly are not private – unless you are fortunate enough to attend a school with sound-proof practice facilities, you will be heard and hear others while practicing in them. Sometimes new singers are very inhibited about practicing in such an environment. They don’t want to be heard and judged by others, and they fear being embarrassed by sounds they may make as they try out new techniques. The fact is that singing is vulnerable, and to be successful, you must make peace with that fact early in your study. “Whereas most musicians can remove from its case the instrument they play, may clear foreign matter from it by blowing into it, or shaking it out, tune it, replace worn-out parts of it, sell it, or if necessary throw the whole tiresome thing away, the singer has none of those options….You, singer, are the instrument.” Everyone using practice rooms is in the same situation, and if you are a serious student of singing, you will push through fears and inhibitions, stay focused on your goals, and learn to feel alone in a crowd when using practice rooms.
Secondly, a practice space must be reasonably comfortable. Many college practice rooms are spartan, to say the least, but you must not be so distracted by extreme temperatures or lack of space or lighting that you literally cannot concentrate. If the only practice space available to you does not have good climate control, practice during times of day when the temperature outside supports the least amount of distraction – in the morning or evening during hot weather, for instance, or during the afternoons in cold weather months. Choose a space that offers enough room to move around as you sing, and even to stretch a bit. This is important for relaxing your body and facilitating natural movement in your singing. A practice space certainly need not be large, but it must not feel claustrophobic either.

WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE?

Even for a singer who is consistent in putting in practice time, carefully chosen tools can make the difference between effective and ineffective practice. The following is a checklist of ten tools needed for the most effective practice sessions.

1. Copies of all music you are planning to practice.

While this sounds painfully obvious, it requires planning on two levels. You must know what you want to rehearse when you go to practice, and you must be sure you have it with you. For the most ease in accomplishing this, make copies of all pieces you are currently rehearsing, punch them, and keep them in a 3-ring notebook that you can easily grab whenever you are going to practice. Keep
translations of songs and any other handouts with vocalises or notes from lessons in a section of this notebook as well, so that you have all needed materials readily at your disposal. Add music and other helps as needed, and remove songs when you are no longer currently working on them; keep them in another notebook for reference.

2. A Piano or Keyboard

Even if your piano skills are limited, you need access to a keyboard during practice sessions, in order to give yourself starting pitches for and / or play warm-ups, test your pitch accuracy periodically while singing songs, and in order to play at least the melodies of songs that you are learning. While a smart phone may provide a small keyboard application, it will not be large enough to play entire song melodies in an efficient manner and will certainly not be sufficient to enable singers with more advanced piano skills to play accompaniments. Certainly, there will be times when you must warm up or practice in a space with no keyboard, but this should not be the rule for daily practice.

3. A Clock

You will need to have a means of keeping track of how you’re dividing your time. Be sure to have a watch or cell phone with you in order to do this, or choose a practice room with a clock. An awareness of time will keep you focused and goal-oriented.

4. A Pencil
Mark changes and helpful discoveries you make while practicing as well as trouble spots that are revealed as you work through your music. Make these notes right in your music, always in pencil so that you can change them as your abilities, information, and input from teachers and coaches evolve. This is another great reason for practicing off of copies so that your original books or copies are not marked up.

5. **Recording Devices**

If you have recorded your lessons and/or accompaniments on a laptop, smart phone, or digital recorder, bring it to the practice room with you so that you can review your teacher’s instructions and vocalise suggestions, practice with the piano accompaniments, and even record portions of your practice time to play back so that you can listen for both improvements and problem areas. “Keen self-listening is central to musical excellence. Without it, performers heedlessly sing off pitch…They sound good to no one but themselves. With…recording devices, however, accurate self-assessment comes within the reach of all musicians.”

Listening to your singing is both revealing and reassuring and should play some part in every singer’s practice regimen, particularly to those who are primarily auditory learners.

6. **Water**

Hydration is essential to maintaining vocal health, with eight full glasses per day being a standard recommended amount to be consumed, and no singer should embark on a significant amount of practice time without having access to drinking
water. Invest in a good-quality water bottle, and bring it with you to practice sessions, as repeatedly leaving your practice space to get drinks from a water fountain wastes time and facilitates distraction. “Water…is of great importance for proper functioning of the…vocal tract. When the vocal folds vibrate and rub against each other, friction and heat are generated. The wider the amplitude of vibration, the higher the intensity level and the greater the friction…This increased viscosity can be reduced by insuring that the vocal folds are well lubricated…”

7. A metronome

Singers tend to shy away from the use of this effective tool in maintaining a steady tempo. We tend to think of metronomes as the province of pianists and other instrumentalists, but the use of a metronome can be invaluable in helping you maintain tempi as well as understand and feel the beat of a song, particularly in challenging, syncopated sections. Most smart phones have a metronome application available, and metronomes come in small shapes and sizes that are very convenient for transporting to a practice facility.

8. A mirror

Visual learners may benefit the most from the use of a mirror during practice time, but all singers should use it to some extent. Ideally, you should choose a practice space with a full-length mirror available. Many practice rooms in college facilities have them. Certainly, if a full-length mirror is not available, you should bring a hand-held mirror of some kind with you. Many tensions that we face as
singers become such a part of us that we no longer feel their effects, as devastating as they may be. Teacher of Alexander Technique Hope Martin concurs: ‘Our kinesthetic sense – our sense of the body’s position and movement – adapts to our habits and reads them as right. So we may think we’re…moving one way when we’re really doing something quite different.’...

Watching yourself enables you to become your own teacher, in part, because you can see and correct faults in your singing before someone else – a teacher, coach, or stage director - has to point them out to you.

9. **A music stand**

Singers, because their instrument does not require the use of their hands, can often forget the importance of using a music stand while practicing. They will often choose to hold their music as if in a choral rehearsal or to simply set it on the piano. This is problematic, as much of your practice time should take place standing up, neither sitting slouched on the piano bench, nor creating unnecessary upper body tensions by holding music. “If your music is placed at the wrong height….you can develop bad habits regarding posture, breath control,…and other basics that lead to good musical development.” Invest in a stand – it need not be expensive, just easily portable – or choose a practice room that has one.

10. **Comfortable clothing**

While this point seems quite obvious, it is noteworthy, as too-tight clothing can make proper breathing difficult or impossible, and uncomfortable clothes or shoes can be a great distraction. Practicing is difficult; it is a discipline, and we are all
prone to distractions, particularly ones caused by discomfort. Be intentional when choosing what you will be wearing while practicing. If you are working on breathing, for instance, choose clothing that, while comfortable, gives you a landmark to breathe down or out into – a belt, for instance, that while not too tight, does provide definition that you can see and feel as you attempt to breathe properly. Additionally, wear clothing that makes you feel good about yourself, particularly if you are a visually-oriented person. Don’t wear items that contribute to poor self-esteem, as you are working on a very vulnerable art that requires a great deal of confidence, and as you will be looking in a mirror during parts of your practice time. Give yourself every reason to succeed!

**WHEN SHOULD I PRACTICE?**

There is a dieting adage that states, “The best diet is the one that works for you.” In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all diet plan, no magic solution to a weight problem. A person desiring weight loss must find a regimen that is realistic, practical, motivating, and sustainable for him or her, and this regimen may vary greatly from what works for someone else. The same holds true for scheduling practice time. A morning person may find practice time early in the day to be the most profitable, while a night owl will be more alert and energized during the evening hours. If you are a student, you will need to schedule practice time that co-ordinates well with your class schedule. Practice time must be treated as an appointment. You must not view it as something you will fit in among other activities as you are able, or you will not do it. Sit down with your schedule
and find realistic time every day that will work as practice time, and then designate it as such in your calendar. Practice time must not be viewed as practice time OR laundry / coffee / workout / study time, but as a commitment as constant in your mind as your class or work schedule. You must not decide not to practice simply because you don’t feel like it on a particular day. “Some musicians think that they can’t be productive unless they’re already motivated. But productivity and motivation fuel each other…So abide by your practice schedule, and keep your productivity rolling. What if your practice time arrives and you don’t have any burning insights to express? Warm up and get started anyway.”

That said, take your own natural rhythms into account, and to the degree your schedule permits, practice at a time when you will be alert and at your best vocally. Morning practice, for example, may not be best for a singer who suffers from LPR – laryngopharyngeal reflux, a common condition among many singers, which results in greater morning vocal edema and mucus production than later in the day.

Evening practice time is not feasible for the student who completes a full day of school at four or five p.m., then heads off to a part-time job, returning exhausted at nine or ten p.m. If you are groggy and hit an energy low around two or three p.m., then don’t schedule your practice time for mid-afternoon. Know yourself, know your schedule, and while you may not always be able to find a completely ideal practice time, do your best to find workable time within the time constraints you have.
HOW LONG SHOULD MY PRACTICE SESSIONS BE?

For singers, an hour of singing practice per day is generally sufficient for steady progress, while ensuring that vocal health and adequate vocal rest are maintained.\textsuperscript{12} For many busy students, however, available practice time during a given weekday does not fit tidily into one-hour increments. If this is the case for you, do not assume that you have no time to practice! You will lose a lot of valuable practice time as a result. Instead of thinking in terms of an hour at a time, schedule two thirty-minute blocks, three twenty-minute blocks, or even four fifteen-minute blocks of practice time on days when you do not have an hour at a time, and schedule what you can on days when you do not have a full hour at all. Small, well-planned sessions can be as profitable as longer sessions. In fact, dividing your practice time into smaller sections may actually yield better results than one long session. “To stave off weariness and promote deeper learning, arrange several practice sessions each day, preferably at comparable hours throughout the week…your solo practice needs to be highly productive and minimally fatiguing.”\textsuperscript{13} Violinist David Oistrakh puts it this way: “Start off in the morning; put the violin away; practice in the afternoon; put it away; practice at night; put it away; practice before bedtime.”\textsuperscript{14} In addition to believing the faulty premise that we must practice for an hour at a time, we tend, also mistakenly, to think of practice time as strictly singing time. Certainly, vocalizing and singing large sections of songs are important elements of daily practice,
but practicing encompasses many aspects of singing, including memorization of songs, working on song texts in foreign languages, and learning difficult melodic or rhythmic sections in your music. Re-defining practice time in this way is tremendously helpful as you seek to divide it efficiently.

**HOW DO I DIVIDE MY PRACTICE TIME?**

As with all other elements of practice, the division of your practice time requires intentionality and forethought. Many factors affect your decision-making process about this aspect. Certainly, practice time before a major vocal event such as a recital, audition, or performance of a role will take on priorities specific to the demands of the upcoming occasion, as will be discussed in further chapters. When dealing with vocal injury or illness, you will need to find creative ways around your temporary vocal limits, and this will affect division of labor during practice time as well. You must always be flexible and tailor practice time to your specific needs. It is very helpful, however, to come up with a general, daily routine for the majority of your practice days, and this routine will generally need to consist of the following elements:

1. **Vocalizing**

   For your practice time to be most effective and vocally healthy, you will need to vocalize prior to tackling music, which, at the college level or beyond, will almost certainly feature challenging sections that stretch the vocal range. Allowing the voice time to warm up is the best defense against injury as well as frustration as you attempt to master difficult sections. “Because the vocal
instrument is physical, a graduated program of warming up is as appropriate to singing as to any athletic occasion. To start off singing high-lying phrases, or phrases that traverse the entire range, is not advisable.” Additionally, vocalizing is vital for concentrating on techniques that you are seeking to master, a topic that will be more thoroughly explored in the next chapter. I would suggest that about a third of your daily practice time be spent vocalizing. Therefore, if your goal is sixty minutes of practice per day, plan to dedicate about twenty minutes to vocalizing, particularly if you are a beginning voice student or are trying to get back into optimal vocal shape following a hiatus from singing. The advanced singer working toward a specific goal may not require this amount of vocalization in every practice session, but it is a good general rule for the student singer. If you are not able, on a given day, to dedicate one continuous hour to singing, divide the twenty minutes among your thirty, twenty, or fifteen-minute sessions. Depending upon your needs, vocal health and stamina, and time between practice sessions, you may choose to vocalize in one block, or you may choose to vocalize a bit each time you return to practicing. On days when you do not have a full hour to practice, warm up for at least five to ten minutes.

2. **Song work**

Working on song repertoire is perhaps the most rewarding portion of practice time, and that which we most associate with practicing. Because it can involve many elements and aspects of singing, song work should comprise at least
half of your daily practice time - about thirty minutes per day. Your song work will look different depending upon your needs in a given day / week / month / semester, and may include learning new repertoire, building of vocal technique into repertoire, mastering songs or portions of songs in foreign languages, or testing out your independence with accompaniment – all aspects that will be covered, in greater detail in later chapters. As a jury, recital, or role performance draws close, you may spend the bulk of this time simply singing through your repertoire in performance order to become increasingly comfortable with the sequence of singing you will be performing.

3. Troubleshooting

At almost any time, you will have songs or portions of songs in your repertoire that are causing you trouble, be it because of rhythms, language concerns, or challenging tonalities. Take about ten minutes of your daily practice time to go straight to the sections and phrases that are giving you trouble within your songs, and listen to, play, and / or sing them repeatedly. Let overcoming your musical issues be the focus of this portion of your practice time, as opposed to the singing technique and musical expression that should comprise the majority of your song work. Work on the same trouble spots daily until you have mastered them, can re-incorporate them successfully into the piece(s) as a whole, and are ready to tackle new trouble spots. Isolating trouble spots in this way keeps you from either bogging down during your song work to fix them, or from continually glossing over them to stay on schedule with your song work. Gerald Klickstein, author of *The Musician’s Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness*, suggests drawing from the following problem-solving tactics when practicing trouble spots:
1. **Vary rhythms** – change the rhythm of a problematic passage to help clean it up, particularly in melismatic sections.

2. **Work from the end** – isolate the problem area by practicing it and then adding what comes before, a little at a time, to get the trouble spot back in context.

3. **Modify the rate of change** – slow your tempo so that you progress from note to note more slowly, giving you time to hear the next pitch in your head before singing it.

4. **Focus on components** – Vocalize or clap rhythms, speak text, and sing notes separately, depending upon what makes the passage difficult for you, and then put them back together.

5. **Omit, then re-insert pitches** – This is an especially helpful suggestion when trying to master ornaments in vocal music; practice without the ornamentation and then add it back in gradually, when you have mastered the main melodic line.

6. **Reconstruct** – Take difficult passages apart, e.g. singing only the starting pitches of groups of sixteenth notes in a melisma, and then building the passage a few notes at a time.

7. **Edit** – If a composer has written something highly impractical – e.g., a truly impossibly long phrase to manage on one breath, work out a way to deal with it – by omitting a note or part of a note.
4. Memorizing

To a degree, you will memorize your jury, recital, or role simply as a result of your consistency in daily practice, which will naturally lead to your independence from the score. This process alone, however, is rarely enough for the serious student of singing or professional performer to thoroughly memorize the amount of music he or she must learn in a very finite period of time. It is useful, then, to dedicate about 5 minutes per hour of designated practice time to memorization. This daily attention to memorizing your music will help prevent the need to attempt to do so quickly with little time before a performance. Learning styles will play a large part in how memorization is accomplished. The visual learner may find studying small sections of a score, and then looking away from it while testing his or her memory to be most effective. The auditory learner may want to listen to sections of the song repeatedly until he or she can sing those sections from memory, while a more kinesthetic learner may need to repeatedly play or sing sections of a piece in order to memorize it, versus simply studying the score or listening to the piece. For the most effective memorization, however, you will probably need to incorporate all three elements. Memorizing in this fashion, a little per day, will keep you from unnecessary panic and stress as a performance draws near.

While I have suggested vocalizing, song work, troubleshooting, and memorization as elements to incorporate into a suggested hour of practice time per day, it is certainly worth noting that the given time frames for any of these elements can be reduced or
extended, depending upon a singer’s specific needs at a specific time. Additionally, many of the elements of effective practice can take place outside of your designated practice space and scheduled practice time. You can memorize your texts, work on language concerns, and think through expressive elements outside of the practice room, even if your actual singing time is one scheduled hour per day. A serious student or professional singer will often spend this extra time at least a few days per week, particularly as a performance draws near. Doing so will yield big dividends in the practice room and beyond.


Ibid.


L. Arick Forrest. “Laryngeal Pathology” (Class lecture at the Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, Ohio, March 7, 2011).


Ibid, 11.

Miller, *Art of Singing*, 162.

Ibid.

Chapter 3: BUILDING TECHNIQUE THROUGH PRACTICE

On some level, we all understand that our singing technique itself is built upon the discipline of practice, yet we are often unsure of how to intentionally work on such technical elements as breath intake and management, resonance, soft palate lift, and negotiation of registers. We approach practice time merely as an opportunity to learn our music, hoping that improved technical prowess will somehow be a side benefit to our time spent singing the same passages over and over again, an approach that can result in discouragement and frustration when that does not prove to be the case. “Although the art of singing can be learned only through singing, the systematic organization of vocal technique is the most efficient route to the realization of the primary goal: production of beautiful sound.”¹ We must build technique into our singing by intentionally building technical work into our daily practice routines.

YOUR TEACHER’S ROLE

Your teacher’s studio is the first stop on your journey toward technical success in your singing. It is vital that you work with a teacher with whom you have a good relationship, whom you trust implicitly, and who prioritizes the teaching of healthy technique. (See Appendix A for a more thorough listing of what to look for in a teacher.) Let him or her be your guide to what you need to do technically. Listen intently at your lessons to your
teacher’s critiques of and suggestions for your technique. Be a proactive learner. Ask questions about why he or she is using a particular vocalise with you, or what technical aspects of your singing he or she is seeking to address by assigning you a certain piece. If you question a good teacher in this way, in the spirit of learning versus defensiveness or suspicion, he or she will be happy to enlighten you, and your questions will probably lead to some great discussions and further insights. Come to lessons prepared to receive this information. Bring a recording device such as a smart phone, laptop computer, or digital recorder, and /or take notes. There is nothing more frustrating than having a technical breakthrough in a lesson and then forgetting what exercise, piece, or explanation from your teacher triggered it. I often tell my students that lesson time is when I open the toolbox and hand them tools; it’s up to them to take the tools and use them during the week in the practice room. Take the tools from your teacher, and ask for more! After all, the ability to become one’s own teacher should be the goal of all good teaching. As you are practicing, refer to notes from lessons past and use the tools you have been given.

**A CORRECT VIEW OF VOCALIZING**

We discussed in the previous chapter the importance to your vocal health of warming up before working on repertoire, but you must not view warming up the vocal apparatus as the only goal of vocalizing. It is during the vocalizing portion of your practice each day, particularly early in your study, that you will potentially gain the most technical benefit, if you are intentional in choosing vocalises and in choosing an effective sequence for
them. “If it is true that the voice is an instrument that functions best when mechanically most efficient…and that one must accomplish a variety of vocal gymnastics in order to be equipped for the exacting demands of literature…, then it seems reasonable to devise specific exercises to help achieve the freely functioning voice.” It is useful at this point to compare vocalizing to weight-lifting workouts. It is an established fact that when working out, you should perform exercises targeting all major muscle groups. Think of your vocalizing in the same fashion. As mentioned above, ask your teacher to help you come up with a general sequence of vocalises designed to target various aspects of your singing. Work from general aspects of warming up to more specific features of singing, as suggested in the following sequence. (See Appendix B for a listing of specific exercises which pertain to each element in the sequence.)

1. **Body Work**: Singing is a whole-body activity, and this must be understood and addressed from the outset of vocal study and the beginning of each practice session. All musicians, singers and instrumentalists alike, are affected by their physical state as they approach practice time, but singers especially so, as we carry our instruments in our bodies. You don’t practice in a vacuum - you bring into the practice room with you your physical tensions, aches and pains, and fatigue, and you must therefore address these body issues to some degree before addressing your vocalism. Take some time to tune in to where you feel the most physical tension, and then take a few minutes at the outset of your practice session to alleviate it. Are your neck and shoulders tense? Start with some careful neck rolls and stretches. Does your general
posture feel compressed and slumped? Bend over at the waist, and pull yourself up slowly, taking your arms all the way over your head. Do you feel tense all over? Shake out your body or jump up and down a few times. Do your legs feel tight and locked? Do some knee bends. This kind of intentional body movement facilitates relaxation, alertness, and clear thinking as you approach your practice session. “Stretching takes out the kinks and lets the body breathe…Even two minutes of stretching works wonders by circulating blood and oxygen to thirsty tissues throughout the body…Body energy is self energy, and when you let it come out, you express yourself…Stretching releases tense muscles, preparing them for work.”

2. **Breathing** – Much of our success in almost every area of singing is dependent upon correct breath intake and management, and as a result, singers are continually in pursuit of greater breath control and efficiency. The great mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne once stated that she believed proper breathing was “ninety percent at least” of good singing. This is especially true during the early years of vocal study, and some breathing work should be part of every young singer’s daily vocal regimen. Take some time to breathe deeply. Often, sitting or even lying down helps facilitate the low abdominal release so necessary for a good breath intake, particularly if you are just mastering this skill. Use your hands as a guide – place them underneath your rib cage and expand your abdomen into them as you inhale – or lean into the crook of a piano or pull a music stand against your belly and breathe against it, to feel
yourself expand. Work on a measured breath release as well. Try exhaling on a steady /s/, or practice panting to help facilitate appoggio, defined by Richard Miller as “a dynamic balance among the muscles of the abdomen and the torso.”5 Simply inhaling and exhaling a few times will calm you and help you to focus as you prepare to sing.

3. Resonance – While sound is produced at the laryngeal level, it is amplified / prolonged / enhanced / changed into what we hear as sound when it meets the interference of the resonators – i.e., the mouth, nose, and throat. Resonance is often defined as “a response to a produced sound, during which that sound is prolonged and amplified.”6 The shaping of the aforementioned resonance cavities during singing is of paramount importance in determining the timbre of the sound, as well as the singer’s comfort level while singing. “Clearly, when coordinated action takes place between vocal folds and the flow of air (aerodynamic/ myoelastic precision), producing a match between laryngeal configuration and vocal tract configuration, many singers experience some frontal sensation in the head…singers should rely upon such sensation as part of the self-monitoring process of the sounds they produce.”7 While the “frontal sensation” Miller alludes to is a result of good singing, and not a cause of it, for a beginning singer, seeking to produce this sensation is a very tangible way of beginning to achieve efficient resonance. Some work with closed vowels, those which foster “a timbre…with a desirable balance of low and high harmonic partials”8 such as /i/ and /u/, as well as humming, can help
encourage a vocally resonant sound that feels comfortable and manageable for you, and sets you up with great tone production for the duration of your practice session. Do not force yourself into the extremes of your range during this portion of your vocalizing. Stay in your comfortably low to mid range, and gradually work from closed vowels, where the “frontal sensation” is most easily achieved, to more open vowels, where it can be more difficult to produce.

4. **Registration** – Having prepared your body for singing through relaxation and breathing exercises, and having established a resonant, efficiently-produced tone in your comfortable range, you are now ready to begin venturing into the upper and lower reaches of your range, and this extension will require the negotiation of *passaggi*, or “passage zones” as you transition into your upper and lower registers. In 1894, Manuel Garcia defined a register as “a series of consecutive homogeneous sounds produced by one mechanism, differing essentially from another series of sounds equally homogeneous produced by another mechanism…” As singers, we understand that the “mechanisms” to which he refers are light versus heavy registration. In heavy registration, often referred to as chest voice, the cords are thick with wide amplitude and firm glottal closure, and the vocalis muscle is active, resulting in a tone rich in partials. In light registration, or head voice, the cords are thin with narrower amplitude, brief and / or incomplete glottal closure, and an active cricothyroid muscle, resulting in fewer partials. Middle voice will exhibit
characteristics of both. Registration also has an acoustical component. In 1988, Raymond Colton defined registers as “a series of consecutive fundamental frequencies of approximately equal quality.” Pedagogue Kenneth Bozeman agrees: “...it is now clear that acoustic factors play a prominent, interdependent, and influential role in...registration. Timbral shifts previously thought to indicate changes in laryngeal muscular adjustment turn out more often to be caused by the changing interactions between voice source harmonics and vocal tract resonances.” The implications of these findings for you in the practice room are that your vocal cords must make a physical shift as you ascend and descend, and that for the best possible sound and your greatest comfort, you must make acoustical adjustments to your vocal tract to accommodate those changes. These adjustments include lowering the larynx, lifting your soft palate, modifying vowels, and speeding up your airflow. At this point in your vocalizing, begin singing longer, scalar patterns – perhaps eight or nine-tone scales versus five-tone scales. You may want to add in some arpeggi as well. Do several exercises of this type, and go a bit higher and lower on each consecutive one, in order to begin the process of warming up the extremes of your range and to practice negotiating passaggi points via the acoustical adjustments described above.

5. Agility and Flexibility – Richard Boldrey, best known for his extensive catalogue of repertoire listed by voice type, defines agility as “the ability to sing turns, trills, scales, and arpeggios easily, at fast speeds, and with clear
articulation,” and flexibility as “a voice’s pliability…A flexible voice is one that can change dynamics and colors easily, one that expresses itself with many nuances.” Both elements are necessary to varying degrees, according to voice type, but all voice types need to foster whatever agility and flexibility they can and that their repertoire requires. Agility and flexibility work should comprise the last stage of your warm-up. Work on some extended and complex scalar patterns and arpeggi, taking them gradually into the highest and lowest reaches of your range, bearing in mind that you should challenge but not hurt yourself here. Ask your teacher for advice on range parameters. Experiment with dynamic changes, working to deliberately crescendo and decrescendo throughout your vocalizing.

APPLYING VOCALISES TO REPERTOIRE

As you conclude your warm-up and move into your song work, be aware of ways that you can bring your vocalises to bear on difficult passages in your music. Never view your warm up as a separate entity from your literature, but as a gateway into it. Do you have trouble finding a resonant sound in a particularly low or middle-voice passage in a piece you are singing? Try singing that section on an /u/ or /i/ vowel, or hum it, and then return to the text, seeking to continue to create the same sensation. Did you discover a vowel modification that enabled you to successfully negotiate a difficult passaggio point as you entered your upper range? Try similarly modifying a problematic vowel in a similar range in your repertoire. Re-sing an especially helpful agility exercise to enable
you to better approach a demanding cadenza in your current aria. Carefully chosen vocalises can be your best friend in achieving technical progress in your repertoire.

**APPLYING REPertoire TO REPertoire**

In addition to applying vocalises to your repertoire, you can use songs or arias that are working well for you technically to address technical issues in other pieces or passages. Be intentional in choosing a practice order for your repertoire. After you vocalize, begin your practice with the piece or even the section of a piece that you feel most confident about, that enables you to easily make your best technical sound, in order to create a template for the rest of your rehearsal. As you discover which passages seem to consistently come easily for you, mark them as go-to spots for your practicing – places where your technique seems to come together in all aspects. Examine why those spots work well for you, and then go directly to problem spots or pieces, and seek to apply the same breathing / vowel modification / resonance there. You will be surprised at how much this kind of approach helps. The discovery that you can make the sound you want in one passage gives hope and motivation for the passages where you haven’t quite mastered it yet. Figuring out what is working for you gives you a tangible tool to apply where things are not working as well.

As you can see, as with all aspects of practicing, technical progress is dependent upon an intentional plan of attack rather than unfocused repetition. As you think and structure your rehearsal time to facilitate technique, you will make ever more rapid progress.
Efficient and deliberate practicing has a great payoff in this aspect so crucial to confidence and consistency in performance.


2 Ibid, xxi.


7 Miller, *Art of Singing*, 84.

8 Miller, *Structure of Singing*, 156.

9 Ibid, 115.


Chapter 4: MASTERING REPERTOIRE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

For many voice students, the college years are their first experience with singing in a language other than their own. The tasks of mastering new techniques, dealing with increased musical challenges, and learning a large volume of repertoire in a semester’s time are often overwhelming. When these requirements are complicated by the fact that several of the assigned pieces are in a foreign language, students can easily become overwhelmed and flounder without a game plan. Like other aspects of singing—technique, ease on stage, and beauty of tone, for example—working in foreign languages comes more easily to some singers than to others. A student with little or no training in a language may be able to learn a piece in it quickly and with little effort, because she has a natural ability to quickly hear and process language. Conversely, a professional singer, with years of practice behind him, might continually work very hard to make a language other than his own sound natural. Make no mistake—for the student interested in pursuing a career as a concert or operatic artist, authenticity in your language skills is vital. “For a singer, having inadequate language skills is equivalent to having inadequate intonation; the music just does not sound right. The sensitive listener will be put off by one just as much as the other, no matter how beautiful the voice.”1 Regardless of your natural gifts in this area, you must approach the mastery of songs in foreign languages
systematically and employ a holistic visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approach for the most authentic results.

**LISTEN**

Your earliest encounters with language come through your ear-gate. Long before you could read in your native language, you spoke it, as a result of hearing it repeatedly spoken to and around you. “The first meaningful word usually appears at the age of one year…At least by three years or before, conversations may be carried on and vocabulary may exceed 1000 words.”² It is a fact that the quickest way to master language is to immerse yourself in it, hearing it and only it spoken until its sound and meanings are clear and begin to enter your subconscious. “Achieving an advanced level [of proficiency in a foreign language] usually requires spending a prolonged period in the country where the language is spoken and much practice speaking it oneself.”³ The difficulty for classical singers is that we must learn to be proficient in the pronunciation and at least rudimentary understanding of several languages, most notably English, Italian, German, and French. While some lucky students may be able to spend significant time abroad during their undergraduate years, most will not be able to spend enough time in more than one or two countries to achieve linguistic mastery of the languages. So, what’s a singer to do?

1. **Take classes** in one or more of the languages mentioned above. While almost every college vocal performance program offers and requires diction classes in at
least English and Italian, with many offering and requiring diction classes in German and French as well, many do NOT require singers to take classes in the grammar and conversation of those languages. While diction classes will give you a broad overview of the sound of a language, and of its grammar as it applies to sound, they cannot provide the depth of understanding to be gained by studying a language as a whole. Language classes are generally time-intensive, but the payoff for the serious student of singing is well-worth the effort. You may not be able to fit all languages in during your undergraduate tenure, but try to take at least two, for one year each. You will be amazed at how much easier pronunciation and memorization are when you have a thorough understanding of a language. “It is absolutely essential to study the grammar of each language as thoroughly as possible. Fluency is not required, but developing an ear for the cadences, modulations, and phrasings of a language will make a significant difference in the authority with which it is sung.” At the very least, take advantage of all diction offerings, applying yourself well in these classes.

2. **Listen to recordings.** When your teacher assigns you a song, immediately find a quality recording of it. Never at any time in history has this been an easier task. With the popularity of YouTube and songs for sale on iTunes and other online venues, recordings of almost anything you work on are at your fingertips. Listen to other songs and arias in the language as well. “It is crucial that students of singing hear Italian, French, and German sung by a variety of native singers.” This practice will help get the language as a whole into your ear before you tackle
a specific piece. Listen for the rhythm of the language – is it vowel or consonant driven? Are its sounds familiar to you but in different combination than those of your native tongue, or does it feature completely different sounds? Is its timbre generally bright or generally dark? Answering these kinds of general questions will help you to better deal with the language within the confines of a specific piece. (See Appendix C for a listing of linguistic characteristics of Italian, French, and German.) Take the time to do this even if you have taken a language and feel fairly confident in your ability to speak it. Often sung language carries slightly different rules and pronunciations than spoken language. Listen as well while doing other things - in your car or on your mp3 player as you walk around campus or exercise. Let your subconscious begin to absorb the sound of the language in this way.

1. **Record someone speaking your text for you.** Move from general exploration of the language to specific pronunciations of the piece you are working on. Record your teacher or coach speaking your text slowly and clearly, perhaps in the rhythm of the song. This is especially applicable at the outset of your study. Teachers will generally require more independence as you progress in your linguistic knowledge and comfort, but most will have no issue with helping you in this way during the early years of your study.

2. **Listen to a good recording while looking at the score.** As a teacher of singing, I am amazed at how often students fail to take this simple but vital step. They will listen to recordings and they will study the score, but
surprisingly, often do not put these two steps together, yet joining visual and auditory forces in this way yields excellent results. “…singer[s] should learn to rely on…feeling, hearing, and seeing. All three of these parameters are essential…They should be given equal importance.” What you are hearing will make sense as you see the words before you; what you are seeing will come to life as you hear it sung. Whether you are an auditory or visual learner, your strength will help your weakness in this exercise, and the result will be both a more thorough understanding of the language puzzle before you and greater confidence as you work toward performance of the piece. I would use the metaphor of painting here. The final paint job will only be as polished and thorough as the painter’s pre-job preparation – the priming, the taping off of edges, the careful use of drop cloths to prevent a mess. Prime your singing of any piece by spending listening and study time on it before you ever sing the first note.

**VISUALIZE**

No matter what your overall learning style, the mastery of music for the serious voice student involves a strong visual element. Looking at a score while listening to a recording, as described above, is one way you take music in via the eye-gate. Giving yourself visual pronunciation cues is another.
1. **International Phonetic Alphabet.** If you take college-level diction classes, one of the first elements that you will be taught is the International Phonetic Alphabet, an invaluable tool for codifying and universalizing language for singers and linguists alike. Says noted linguist David Adams, “The International Phonetic Alphabet…is an indispensable tool in any discussion of the sounds of a language.”

Referred to as IPA, this system uses symbols for sounds, and when properly applied, can remove almost all guesswork from pronunciation. Once you learn IPA symbols, you can go through a new piece, as you listen to it, and write in the symbols for the sounds you are hearing above each word, giving you concrete reference points for pronunciation. As your diction classes progress, you will learn specific IPA symbols for each language. Generally the sequence begins with English and Italian diction and progresses to German and French diction. Apply yourself in your diction classes, as IPA is one of the most vital linguistic tools we singers have. (see Appendix D for IPA resources) If you have not yet had IPA, you should still give yourself visual cues as you work through your music with your teacher or coach, writing in sounds above difficult words that will help you remember how to pronounce them. Do not assume that you will remember what you’ve heard; write it down!

2. **Translations.** Additionally, find a good translation of the piece, and write it **in your score**, under the foreign text. If you are currently taking or have taken the language you’re singing in, you should attempt to translate it
yourself before turning to resources. (See resources in Appendix D) This is a good exercise; it will solidify the text and its meaning in your brain long before you would begin the formal process of memorization. “The most important aspect in learning a text is knowing exactly what the text means and not just understanding the general thrust of the words. Each song or aria should be translated word for word and the translation written in the music above each word to which it applies.” Whether you translate texts yourself or turn to resources, do not begin working on a piece in a foreign language without knowing its translation! Singing expressively in a non-native language is a challenge in and of itself; memorizing and singing nonsense syllables effectively is almost impossible. When you know the meaning of a text, even words in an unfamiliar language can become reference points for memory, particularly if they are similar to their English equivalents, such as the German word wasser (water), the French term beauté (beauty), or the Italian term voce (voice).

**SPEAK**

You have listened to and seen the language you are working in; now you must employ your kinesthetic sensibilities and speak your text. I would suggest the following three steps in doing so:
1. **Repeat the text.** Make use of the recording of your teacher or coach speaking texts for you. Listen to him or her say 1 line of text at a time, then stop the recording and speak that line before progressing to the next one. Does this sound tedious? Perhaps, but if you take this time at the outset of learning a piece in a foreign language, you will save yourself frustration as you begin to work on the singing of it, and you will set yourself up for faster progress on future pieces in the same language. Working through a song line by line in this way will also enable you to form good questions for your teacher at your next lesson – you will find what lines or words confuse you most so that your instructor can help you most efficiently.

2. **Speak the text.** After you have repeated the text, line by line, a few times, you are ready to simply speak it. Speak slowly and clearly, giving your brain and mouth time to adjust to the new sounds. If necessary, take the piece in sections, repeating and then speaking one verse or section at a time before doing the same with the rest of the piece on another day or during another practice session.

3. **Speak the text in rhythm.** This is a vital step often skipped by students. You may think you don’t need this step; after all, you have spent time listening to and speaking the text, and are no doubt anxious to sing! You cannot, however, sing something until you can speak it, and speaking the text in the rhythm of the piece will expose problem areas where you still have confusion about pronunciation. Adapting a newly-learned text to a specific
rhythm can be tricky, and taking the time to do so carries the side benefit of helping you learn the rhythm independent of the added variable of melody, as well. As with other elements in this sequence, do so in small sections of the piece – one verse at a time. It is better to master a section of a piece during a practice session, and then come back the next time and add another, than to attempt to learn the entire song and end up overwhelmed and unsuccessful.

SING

At last, you get to sing the piece, putting together the elements you have worked on individually. The following sequence will help you to make this long-awaited step successful:

1. Sing the song on a neutral syllable. Though you have worked hard on the text, suspend that element temporarily, and concentrate on simply learning the melody of the song. Depending upon your learning style and the length of the piece, you may want to sing the entire song in this way or simply start with a section of it. Pick a comfortable vowel or syllable such as /la/ or /du/ and lightly sing through the song, identifying melodic trouble spots, and repeating this step until you are comfortable with the overall melodic and rhythmic trajectory of the song. Gerald Klickstein, author of The Musician’s Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness, suggests the possible use of solfege syllables as well during this step: “You may also profit from singing
the melody with fixed-do solfège syllables, letter names, or scale degree numbers. Doing so fuels comprehension of melodic and harmonic structure. Depending on your learning style, it can also aid memorization.  

2. **Sing the song with text.** You are finally ready to reap the results of your preparatory work. Sing the song slowly and in sections, repeating until you feel comfortable. If you have trouble spots, return temporarily to simply speaking the text and /or speaking it in rhythm, and then resume singing. Be patient with yourself; take breaks as needed, and know that the skills you are acquiring through this process will pay off ever more quickly with the next piece that you undertake in the same language.

3. **Sing the song in tempo and add accompaniment.** Once you have a basic knowledge of the melody and of how the text fits into the melodic and rhythmic structure, and are comfortable singing the piece slowly, it is time to try speeding up. Do so gradually, in sections, until you arrive at the correct tempo. Then begin practicing with accompaniment. We will more thoroughly discuss the role of your accompanist / coach in a later chapter, but getting him or her to record the accompaniments to your songs is a great way to maximize this important resource. You should have the accompaniments with you throughout the week as you practice so that when you sing with them live at your lessons you feel comfortable and able to concentrate on other matters such as technique and expressive singing.
BORROW

Once you have put in quality time learning one piece in a foreign language, you should be able to apply the knowledge you gain to new pieces in the same language. When you are assigned a piece in a language in which you’ve worked before, review your other piece(s), looking for the same words and phrases, thus saving yourself valuable rehearsal time. Always work from what you do know and are good at and familiar with to that which is new and difficult. This is one of the important ways in which you learn to become your own teacher, the ultimate goal of all good teaching and of honing your practicing strategies.

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2 Leon Thurman and Graham Welch, Bodymind and Voice: Foundations of Voice Education (Minneapolis: The VoiceCare Network, 1997), 466.

3 Adams, Diction for Singers, xii.

4 Ibid, xi.

5 Ibid.


7 Adams, Diction for Singers, xii.


Chapter 5: PRACTICING REPERTOIRE WITH CHALLENGING TONALITIES AND RHYTHMS

A part of any singer’s vocal training will generally include some exploration of repertoire that features extremely challenging tonalities, intervals, key structures, and rhythms. Though we tend to think of these primarily as features of contemporary repertoire, composed from the beginning of the twentieth-century on, even some compositions of the Renaissance and Baroque eras feature very challenging elements. Certainly, as harmonic structure became more complex during the Romantic Period (1770-1900),\(^1\) vocal lines became more disjunct from accompaniments. “The piano part rose from being simply an accompaniment to the position of being a partner with the voice, sharing equally in the task of supporting, illustrating, and intensifying the meaning of the poetry.”\(^2\) Though the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have produced both relative traditionalists and pioneers when it comes to harmony, it is safe to say that the compositions of recent years are often challenging when it comes to melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structure, as composers test boundaries and work within an ever more individualistic society. How, then, do you meet these challenges and build this type of repertoire into your singing?

RECOGNIZE THE CHALLENGE

If you, the singer are to successfully negotiate the demands of sophisticated harmonies, melodies that seem disjunct and illogical, and mind-bending rhythmic structures, often

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featuring mixed meters and even the absence of meter, you must first recognize the challenge. Singers face slightly more complex hurdles in this area than do instrumentalists. “…An instrumentalist is of necessity taught to read music in the very process of learning to play an instrument…notation (of pitch) indicates keys or valves to press, where to stop a string, etc.”3 As complex as the melody may be, then, instrumentalists have a direct link between what they see and hear. Their fingers play the notes on the page; their ears can make peace with the results as they continue practicing. The singer, however, must hear the next note in a phrase before singing it, often a virtual impossibility in this type of repertoire. This is an especially problematic issue when dealing with quick tempi. Fortunately, you do have resources to help with these issues, and as you take advantage of them, you will be able to meet the demands of tonally-challenging repertoire.

MAXIMIZE RESOURCES

1. Take aural skills classes. Almost all music majors at the college level are required to take aural skills classes, which teach the dual skills of transcribing heard chords and melodies into written music, and of singing melody lines at sight. Many students struggle with these courses, but they can be an invaluable resource if approached with an appropriately broad perspective. “…in combination with theory, familiarity with ear training…enables you to soak up the syntax of a piece as first sight…Despite that, general music courses will stoke your development only if you integrate their content into
your practice…Pledge yourself to a lifelong quest for encompassing musical literacy.”

Understand that your degree program is holistic; no course is an end unto itself but a building block in the construction of a complete performer. As your eye and ear are trained to work together to see and then sing intervals, you will be taking a giant step forward toward the practical application of this skill in the practice room and ultimately, onstage. If you are beginning to work on some repertoire featuring challenging tonalities, even if your aural skills classes are long past, take a few moments in your practice sessions to review intervals and as suggested in the previous chapter, to sing challenging melodic lines on solfége or numbers. Apply yourself diligently in these types of theory classes, often perceived as tedious by eager young singers; persevere, even if you find the class challenging. You will be glad you did, and your perception of its value will grow as you meet the demands of ever more musically challenging repertoire.

2. Listen. One of the first steps that you must take when beginning to work on any new piece, but particularly one that features difficult harmonic, melodic, and / or rhythmic elements, is to listen to it in the three following ways:

a. Listen purposefully. Take some time to focus on getting the music in your ear by listening to AND looking at the score simultaneously, as discussed in the previous chapter. As with challenging language elements, this step will help you to make sense of what you are seeing and hearing in a melodic and tonal context, so that you will begin to associate what you
are seeing with what you are hearing and vice-versa. “…the most straightforward route to establishing an aural model of a piece is to listen to recordings…peruse several audio or video recordings, with score in hand…”\textsuperscript{5} Identify rhythmic or melodic patterns throughout the piece. Notice the accompaniment. Find places where the first note of your next entrance, for example, is played in the accompaniment, even if it occurs several bars prior to your entrance. Circle it so that as you practice you can train yourself to listen specifically for it and thus enter on the correct pitch. “The identification of musical stresses and releases within the construction of the vocal line is also helpful in finding pitches. The first few notes of a phrase may need to be thought of as leading tones to a stronger pitch occurring later. That later pitch may be easier to locate than the beginning one. So by changing one’s aural focus, preliminary pitches may more easily be found within their new context.”\textsuperscript{6}

b. **Listen in sections.** This directive is particularly applicable if your piece is long, is part of a set of songs, or is especially difficult. Your ear, and thus your concentration, may quickly tire when presented with music that challenges its perception of tonality and beauty. Listen to and study small sections at a time.

c. **Listen subconsciously.** This is perhaps the most vital step of all in learning music with difficult tonalities. Think of all the popular music you know, simply because you have heard it over and over again – on your
mp3 player, in retail establishments, restaurants, and in social settings. You did not necessarily try to memorize these songs; you learned them through repeated exposure when you were not even conscious of listening to them. The same applies to even difficult vocal repertoire. Play it when you are not purposefully studying it; have it in your ear while folding laundry, getting ready for classes, walking around campus, or driving. You will be amazed at how even difficult melodies will become ingrained in your brain as a result.

3. **Rehearse often with your accompanist.** Often your instinct when beginning work on this type of music will be to delay rehearsal with the accompaniment, because you are struggling with the difficulty of the melody and fear that you will not be able to successfully sing it with the added complexities of the accompaniment. The reality, however, is that often the accompaniment, even if complex, gives the melody a context and thus makes it easier to sing. “…locate chords, tone clusters, or intervals in the accompaniment that precede a vocally difficult entrance…getting used to the sound quality and listening for pitches that will enable you to access your beginning note. It could be the same note found in another octave or several beats prior to your entrance. It could also be another note from which you can reference your pitch by singing up or down by a small interval. Rehearse these sections in isolation, gradually assimilating them into larger sections.” No matter your level of proficiency or experience as a singer, you will need many rehearsals with
accompaniment in order to feel comfortable with this type of literature in a performance context. Your brain may continually want to second-guess your ears, and regular rehearsal will help solidify your trust in yourself. If you are not fortunate enough to have an accompanist at every lesson, take the initiative to find a good one at your school and work with him or her often, particularly on this type of repertoire. Even if these rehearsals cost you extra money, the payoff will be well worth the expense.

4. **Have your accompanist record the accompaniments.** Your accompanist cannot be with you every day when you practice, and as stated above, when learning this type of literature, you will need repeated work with accompaniment. Have your accompanist record the piano part on whatever recording device you plan to bring to the practice room. Even if the quality isn’t great, you will benefit tremendously from having the accompaniment readily available to you during practice time. “Never rely on native instinct or guesswork to assume that an interval is correct. Check it thoroughly against accompanying figures...[record] a difficult segment, rehearsing with the [recording] until the pitch is secure.”

**QUALITY AND QUANTITY**

In successfully and thoroughly mastering repertoire with challenging melodies, harmonies, and rhythms, you will need both a large quantity and a high quality of
rehearsal time. How do you achieve both of these elements, particularly when you are also learning other repertoire and dealing with the remainder of your coursework?

1. **Start early.** The more difficult the repertoire - whether from a technical, musical, or interpretative standpoint, the earlier you must begin to work on it in relation to its performance. You cannot cram this type of literature the way you might study at the last minute for a test. The careful listening and consistent rehearsal described above must take place over weeks or even months, depending upon the difficulty and volume of this type of literature that you are performing. “Persistence is...important. Aural skills cannot be magically improved in a few short sessions. But over...a few weeks, dramatic improvement can occur.”[^9] Whether you are preparing for an audition, a voice jury, a recital, or a role, you must learn this type of repertoire very early in your preparation. It should perhaps, in fact, be the first thing you learn when preparing several pieces for a performance, as it will likely take you the longest to internalize, memorize, and with which to achieve comfort. Panic is not a friend to the learning process. Self-knowledge is. Be realistic. This type of repertoire is very challenging for most people to learn. It is probably challenging for you. Plan accordingly and start early.

2. **Practice small sections at a time.** As with almost every aspect of learning music and technique, working on small sections of music at a time will benefit you the most when learning tonally-challenging repertoire. If getting an idea of the whole piece prior to practicing is germane to your learning style, then
go through the entire piece once or twice so that you get a sense of all that needs to be accomplished, but then take it in small sections – a few pages at a time. When you next return to the piece, learn a new small section and then put the two together, continuing in this manner until you have learned the entire song. As mentioned above, this type of repertoire can be fatiguing to the brain and ear, so working in small sections will help you to maintain focus. Sharon Mabry, author of *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire*, suggests incorporating difficult passages into vocalises: “Short, difficult-to-hear sections can be taken apart and used during vocal warm-ups. Making an unfamiliar or awkward interval seem normal to the ear is the goal. If it is incorporated into a daily vocalization routine, it will soon present fewer problems when encountered in the music.”

A few minutes of focused work on this type of piece will yield far greater dividends than a half-hour of absent-minded, careless rehearsal.

3. **Temporarily suspend aesthetic beauty.** When beginning work on tonally or rhythmically difficult music, your primary task is to get the melody and rhythms ingrained in your body and brain. In this type of repertoire, you will almost always have some trouble spots where this is particularly difficult for you. In these areas, you may literally have to beat the melody or rhythm into your brain! “…[Establish] a physical, muscular response to the music. Concentrate on difficult entrances, hard-to-find pitches, angular melodic lines,
and general directions of vocal movement. Exact tempo is not necessary at this stage.” Don’t worry about being musical or even singing with a beautiful tone. Play the trouble spot loudly and slowly on the keyboard, and sing it in a similar fashion. If rhythm is the issue, strongly clap or tap the beat of the problematic section, while loudly speaking and then singing the text. In other words, be a bit obnoxious and exaggerated in order to get the difficult notes and rhythms into your body. As you become more confident about the sections in question, you can begin to re-incorporate them into the piece as a whole, with the appropriate dynamics, phrasing, and quality of sound. You will be surprised at how much this type of reinforcement will help you toward that end.

THE ROLE OF TRUST

One of the most difficult aspects of preparing this kind of repertoire for performance is reaching a level of proficiency in it that enables you to completely trust your ear and memory. The reality is that in some pieces, there are very few pitch cues in the accompaniment, and your entrances seem to come out of tonal thin air. There will be rhythmic challenges that never completely make sense to you. Because of these things, even after months of rehearsal and thorough preparation, there may remain sections of this type of repertoire which still cause you to question whether or not you are entering at correct times and singing correct pitches and rhythms. Your self-trust will be directly related to your preparation. If you have listened to the piece a great deal and worked
extensively with the accompaniment, you have done your job. You must trust your tonal memory in performance, and confidently sing the pitches you are hearing as correct. As with test-taking, this is a situation where you must trust your first instincts, and not second-guess yourself. The ability to sing partly on auto pilot in a performance situation is crucial and will be more thoroughly discussed in upcoming chapters. Learning to trust your instincts, your musicianship, and your preparation are some of the benefits of working on tonally and rhythmically challenging repertoire, and your sense of accomplishment as you are able to perform it is its own reward.

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5 Ibid, 143.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 34.
Chapter 6: PRACTICING DURING ILLNESS

Nothing can interrupt a working practice schedule more thoroughly than illness or allergy symptoms. While to most of the population a simple head cold or allergy is a mere annoyance, for the singer, it can be extremely frustrating, disruptive, and even vocally dangerous if not properly handled. Obviously, if you are truly ill – unable to attend class or work, suffering from vomiting or diarrhea, and/or suffering from a fever, you ought to be in bed, and not in the practice room. But what about when you are well enough to function, yet have a significantly impaired voice? How do you know whether or not to attempt singing?

SHOULD I SING?

It should go without saying, yet bears repeating, that any attempt to practice during illness or an allergy attack should be handled very carefully. You must stay hydrated, even increasing your water intake during this time to help thin the increased mucus your body is producing. “…If [mucus] becomes too thick….it irritates the pharynx and the vocal folds.”¹ You should be carefully and gradually warming up the voice through vocalises each time you practice, but this step is vital when you are sick. Give your voice every chance to succeed in the practice room, even under less-than-ideal physical circumstances, understanding that sometimes, even these precautionary measures will not
be enough during an illness. Your vocal folds are incredibly tiny, yet incredibly precise in their function. Twelve to seventeen millimeters long in women and seventeen to twenty-three millimeters long in men, they complete approximately two hundred fifty cycles of opening and closure per second in order to produce sound, an astounding feat too quick for the naked eye to see.\textsuperscript{2} “Infection of any part of the respiratory tract impairs vocal function. As a matter of fact, disturbances of voice production are frequently out of proportion to the actual tissue alterations in respiratory infection. So complex and finely adjusted is the mechanism of the voice that any change in body sensations throws it out of gear.”\textsuperscript{3} In other words, even slight irritation to the laryngeal area because of even a mild infection, can cause significant issues for the singer. Depending upon the severity of the infection, the area it attacks, and the overall state of your immune system, you may have symptoms ranging from a slight runny nose with some nasal congestion to complete laryngitis and a hacking cough. If the primary involvement remains in the sinuses, you may suffer some irritation but no real impact to the vocal folds themselves, and aside from the inconvenience of feeling a bit under the weather for a few days, you may avoid any interruption to your practice routine other than working through some general fatigue. If, however, your cold involves pharyngeal and laryngeal involvement, you must consider several factors in deciding whether or not to practice. The following three warning signs must not be ignored and most likely mean that you need to take a few days or more off from singing:

1. **Pain** – The adage, “no pain, no gain,” most certainly does not apply to singing. Healthy singing doesn’t hurt! If your attempts to sing consistently
result in laryngeal aching, soreness, or a burning sensation, even after a gentle and gradual warm-up, then stop! Your body is telling you something; listen to it. “To the patient, who cannot see the germs, the symptoms of the infection – such as fever, congestion, and pain – are the disease itself. Actually, these symptoms are the effects of the defense of the body against the infection…Pain – started by pressure of the swollen tissue on the nerve endings – makes the patient aware of the presence of an infection and forces him to rest the sick organ.”

The tissues surrounding your larynx, perhaps even your vocal folds themselves, are irritated. Often this irritation comes as a result of the post-nasal drip so common during upper respiratory infections. This mucus is very irritating to the vocal folds and can result in pain during use.

2. **Hoarseness** – The familiar term generally applied to hoarseness brought on by illness is *laryngitis*, simply “an infection of the larynx,” during which the vocal folds themselves become swollen. “The outstanding feature of acute laryngitis is the disturbance of vocal function…The accumulation of body fluids in the folds, which accounts for the swelling, interferes with the free vibration of the vocal folds.” The result for the singer may range from difficulty initiating tone to inability to sing quietly, to complete loss of most of his or her range. Noted otolaryngologist Dr. Friedrich S. Brodnitz, M.D., author of *Keep Your Voice Healthy*, issues this warning: “…the whole apparatus of voice production is upset during
an acute laryngitis. This general disturbance of vocal teamwork combines with the psychological impact of beginning hoarseness to create a situation where the voice becomes very vulnerable…**many permanent voice troubles have their origins at the danger point of laryngitis.**”

(emphasis mine) Do NOT push your voice when it is hoarse. Brodnitz urges “complete vocal rest for the duration of the infection.” Some of the “permanent voice troubles” he alludes to include vocal polyps, nodules, and even vocal hemorrhage. Even if your laryngitis is not “acute,” and you are manifesting just some vocal weakness or slight loss of range, proceed with caution. “It is better to be conservative and postpone a full vocal workout until the vocal folds are completely healed. Sometimes a short lesson / warm-up is reassuring so long as the goal is to reassure the singer that the voice is still there.”

If you are hoarse to any degree, be very, very careful, listen to your body, and be conservative in the amount of time you sing and the degree of range / volume you use.

3. **Coughing** – Though one of the most annoying features of respiratory illness, mild coughing “is part of the self-cleaning mechanism of the lower airways. The cough reflex with its build-up of pressure behind the closed folds and the subsequent sudden release of air helps to eject mucus from the windpipe and bronchi. Keeping the air passages free promotes faster healing and reduces the danger of further downward spread of the infection…The vocal folds can stand a lot of mild coughing without
harm.” A mild cough, then, is not necessarily, in and of itself, a reason to completely suspend singing, but a deep, violent, hacking cough is another matter altogether. This kind of repeated and violent action can result in vocal fold damage, and if you are suffering from this type of cough, no doubt any prolonged and intense phonating, including singing, will exacerbate it. Often a cough lingers for a few weeks or even months following an upper respiratory infection. While you may be able to resume practicing while you are still coughing, do not do so as long as singing consistently causes you to cough.

SHOULD I TAKE MEDICINE?

We have discussed the potential dangers of singing with a sick larynx, and naturally, as busy singers with the pressure of upcoming performances, we want to return to vocal health as soon as possible. Often, our first inclination is to head to the medicine cabinet, hoping for a quick fix, yet sometimes the supposed cure for an illness can cause side effects almost as irritating as the effects of the illness itself. According to Ohio State University otolaryngologist Dr. L. Arick Forrest, M.D., “as a general rule, a singer should not use any medication unless absolutely necessary.” Forrest goes on to warn that “Most of the medications used for colds or allergies are drying and may thicken your secretions.” Doctors are increasingly cautious about prescribing antibiotics, as well. “Antibiotics need to be used cautiously and only when indicated for bacterial infections. The majority of upper respiratory infections are viral. As a general rule, only upper
respiratory infections that last over 7 to 10 days should be...treated with antibiotics. Whenever possible, antibiotic selection should be directed by cultures."\textsuperscript{15} The headaches, sore throats, and fever that often accompany upper respiratory illness often send singers reaching for non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen. While these drugs are very effective in treating these complaints, they are also blood thinners, and singers must be very judicious in their use of these medications. “With an upper respiratory infection…the blood vessels of the vocal folds…have an increased risk of rupturing causing a hemorrhage into the fold.”\textsuperscript{16} Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be a safe and effective substitute for NSAIDS. (See Appendix E for more information on medications and their impact on the voice.)

**HOW DO I PRACTICE IF I CAN’T SING?**

Depending upon the duration and severity of illness or injury affecting your vocal mechanism, you may find yourself unable to sing for a significant period of time. While this is frustrating for any singer, you can use your time wisely and to your vocal advantage despite the interruption to your singing routine. The following are some ways to maximize your vocal time off:

1. **Memorize.** We have already discussed memorizing your music apart from your normal practice time, while not singing; when you are ill, use the extra time to concentrate especially on this aspect of your singing. Instead of panicking because you cannot physically sing your jury, recital, or audition music, study your score(s) in small sections, recite portions of it aloud, or
listen to it – whatever best fits your learning style with regard to memorization. If you are nearing a performance and already have your music memorized, think through it carefully and in performance order, mentally rehearsing not only the text and music, but thinking through all necessary technical adjustments as well. You will be amazed by the results of this simple exercise.

2. **Listen.** Whether you are listening in order to memorize music, to get the sound of a new language in your ear, or to learn new music, a bout of vocal illness is a great opportunity to spend some extra time listening to your pieces with your score in hand, marking potential trouble spots, highlighting dynamics, and marking spots in the accompaniment from which you can get difficult entrance notes.

3. **Learn notes.** One of the most effective ways to learn new music is to simply play the melody yourself at the piano. You need not be an accomplished pianist to do so. To whatever degree your piano skills allow, play through new music and/or difficult spots in familiar but not-yet-perfected repertoire. Work on difficult rhythmic spots as well, using a metronome to maintain the beat and lightly speaking the text to learn or completely conquer difficult rhythms.

4. **Work on diction.** As discussed in Chapter Four, the learning of a song in a foreign language almost always requires a speaking component. Play a recording of your teacher or coach speaking the text and repeat it phrase by
phrase, read the text aloud, and then read it in rhythm, gradually speeding up
to tempo.

5. **Take care of related matters.** When you are juggling a school, practice,
work, and study schedule, it is easy to put off important but time-consuming
details of voice study. When illness forces you to take some time off from
singing, you may want to use the time to take care of some of the following
matters:

   a. **Format your recital.** If you have a recital coming up, you will have
to at some point type up your program, complete with composer dates,
program notes, and translations. Being proactive with these time-
consuming elements related to your performance is not only a wise use
of your time, but a means of quelling the panic that often arises when
you have an upcoming performance but cannot sing. It is
psychologically reassuring to do something toward your performance
when you are feeling the helplessness that comes with losing your
voice.

   b. **Copy music for your accompanist.** This is another time-consuming
task that singers tend to put off, often because it is somewhat
inconvenient to find a block of time to get it done. Being sidelined
vocally can be a blessing in disguise when it affords you the extra time
to do it. Work ahead. Make double-sided, punched copies of
upcoming jury or recital music, being careful not to cut off the bottom
line of the piano score. Your accompanist will thank you, and you will feel a sense of calm that comes from being organized and prepared well ahead of time.

c. **Write IPA symbols in your score.** A few days off from singing is a golden opportunity to carefully figure out and write in International Phonetic Alphabet symbols in new music. Be neat and thorough; you will greatly enjoy the results when you resume singing.

**MARKING**

Perhaps after a few days off from singing, you are well enough vocally to resume some vocal work, yet not ready to sing full-out. At this point, you might want to consider “marking” your way through some music. “Marking is an international theater term for the technique of sparing the voice during rehearsal. Volume is reduced, high pitches may be lowered an octave, and very low pitches raised an octave…In the male voice, pitches in upper range may be sung in falsetto in substitution for…full voice.” Be careful, however. Singing at a lowered volume and /or in an easier range, does NOT mean singing without an engaged breath mechanism! Attempting to do these things without an energized airstream can result in more irritation to the voice than singing full-out creates. You should not mark through your music without warming up your voice, even if you must modify the duration, range, and volume of your warm-up. After a few days off from singing, test your voice with some moderate vocalizing. Don’t push the range; sing at a comfortable *mezzo-piano* to *mezzo-forte* volume. Following your warm-up, ease
into your repertoire. Start with a piece that doesn’t require huge range or volume, and test your voice out. Sing part of the piece or a couple of pieces approaching full voice, but without pushing, and then mark the rest. Marking is a technique that is learned and “should be examined as a technique with the teacher before the singer attempts it in rehearsals.” If done correctly, though, it provides a gateway from complete vocal rest back to a normal volume and range, following an illness. We will more thoroughly examine this topic in a later chapter, as well.

**MAINTAINING YOUR VOCAL HEALTH**

No document on any aspect of vocalism can be complete without addressing vocal health in a general sense. Certainly illness can cause vocal edema (swelling) resulting in hoarseness, but of even greater concern to the serious singer is the damage that daily vocal abuse can inflict on the voice. When you choose to seriously study singing, with the intent of entering a career involving voice use at an elite level, be that as a teacher of singing, a professional performer, or a combination of both, you are, in effect, choosing to make alterations in your lifestyle that support your career choice. This may mean that you cannot participate in some of the activities your non-singing friends do. Just as an athlete must protect his or her body, or a surgeon must protect his or her hands, you MUST protect your voice. The responsibility is yours. Do not underestimate the importance of good vocal hygiene. Your voice is amazingly resilient, yet fragile, and you cannot expect peak performance from it if you do not treat it with respect. Below is a listing of basic tenets of good vocal hygiene, including things to do, things to avoid, and
advice on when to see a doctor, taken from handouts given to patients at the Ohio State University Otolaryngology Clinics.

1. Things to Do

a. **Hydrate.** - 6 to 8 glasses of water per day will keep your vocal mechanism lubricated and help flush excess mucus from the body.

b. **Maintain general good health through diet and exercise.** What is good for your body is good for your voice. Exercise helps release tension and builds stamina. A healthy diet, with moderate intake of fats, carbohydrates, and dairy, keeps mucus production to a minimum, and supports a healthy voice.

c. **Warm up and cool down.** We have already discussed the importance of warming up the voice; cooling it down following a practice session or performance is equally important and need not be complicated. Simply start in the middle of your singing range, and do a few downward sighs, lip trills, or humming glides to relax the vocal musculature.

d. **Be vocally aware.** Recognize the signs of vocal fatigue - pain, voice breaks (difficulty initiating tone or making dynamic changes), weakness, hoarseness – and rest the voice! You must budget your voice use. Look at your day. Do you have a prolonged choral rehearsal, a rehearsal for a stage production, or both? Plan to use your voice wisely. Mark for part of one or both rehearsals; do not sing a great deal in your practice session.
that day, and do not talk a lot. Like other muscular structures in your body, your voice can only do so much in one day.

e. **Use a natural pitch when speaking.** Do not speak at a higher or lower pitch than that which is natural and comfortable for you. The speaking voice should sit within the lowest third of your comfortable singing range.

f. **Use a lot of air.** Cushion your speaking voice with air as you do your singing voice, particularly when projecting over noise.

g. **Cultivate good general posture.** Not only is proper posture a must for good singing, but it is also important in speaking. Keep the upper body open with relaxed shoulders, chest, and neck, to avoid vocal strain.

h. **Be cautious about voice use in noisy environments.** Learn to speak under instead of over noise in loud places. Get close to the person you are speaking to and talk quietly. Don’t yell over the noise. Doing so, particularly in clubs or bars where the air may be smoke-filled, is a recipe for disaster.

i. **See a doctor** if you have prolonged hoarseness, vocal fatigue, heartburn, or allergies.

2. **Things to Avoid**

   a. **Excessive caffeine use.** Limit your caffeine intake to 2 cups per day. Caffeine is a diuretic and tends to dry the vocal folds, making them susceptible to irritation.
b. **Alcohol.** Alcohol dilates the blood vessels and causes increased mucus production. Habitual use can lead to a rough, hoarse voice quality.

c. **Smoking.** Smoke is a direct irritant to the vocal folds and mucus membranes. It will cause damage to the vocal organ and limit your career.

d. **Vocal sounds.** Don’t make odd vocal sounds such as grunting, reverse phonation (donkey sounds), or mechanical noise such as motorcycle sounds. Making such sounds is abusive and can cause damage to the vocal folds.

e. **Vocal extremes.** Do not linger, when singing OR speaking, in a range that is too high or too low for you.

f. **Whispering.** Ironically, whispering is damaging to the vocal folds. Coughing and throat clearing should also be avoided, as much as possible.

3. **When to see a doctor**

“A hoarse voice, change in the sound of the voice, or noticeable vocal fatigue for 2 weeks requires attention by a qualified voice care team.”

Whether these symptoms are a result of a respiratory infection, allergy, or seem to come out of nowhere, seek medical attention! If you are sick, you should start by seeing your general practitioner or going to your campus health clinic. This may be all that is needed if you are diagnosed with an infection and are simply in need of an antibiotic or prescription decongestant. Additionally, many insurance companies require a referral
from your general practitioner in order to see a specialist, so it makes sense to start there. However, if your symptoms persist, you may need to see a voice specialist. There are two primary groups of professionals that specialize in voice complaints, and they are often both found within the confines of one practice.

a. Physicians – Otolaryngologists (specialists who practice all aspects of ear, nose, and throat medicine) or laryngologists (specialists in voice disorders.) Singers should try to find a qualified laryngologist in their area; if there is not one in your immediate vicinity, find one nearby. Traveling even a couple of hours is well worth the inconvenience for the quality of care. These voice specialists prescribe medicine, give laryngeal injections, do microsurgery on the vocal folds, and operate on the laryngeal skeleton. They have access to a clinical voice laboratory with equipment for viewing the vocal folds and analyzing vocal sound, and best understand the singer’s elite needs and issues. They are often affiliated with a university medical center but are often found in private practice as well, and are often affiliated with a voice team that includes a speech-language pathologist.

b. Speech-language pathologist (SLP) – a certified, licensed professional, holding an M.A., M.S., or PhD. SLP’s can have many specialties within the field, but those affiliated with a laryngology practice are probably specialists in voice pathology. These professionals are responsible for
voice therapy and rehabilitation when an injury has occurred, and in a laryngology practice often assist the physician in the diagnosis of pathologies by performing VLS – video laryngeal stroboscopy.\textsuperscript{22}

When you see a laryngologist, he or she may simply look down your throat using a mirror to take a quick look at your vocal cords, but likely, depending upon your complaint, you may be evaluated via either rigid video laryngeal stroboscopy, in which a rigid scope with a camera at its end is inserted into your mouth as you extend your tongue, or transnasal fiberoptic laryngoscopy, in which a flexible tube is inserted into your nose (usually with the use of a numbing agent), with a “chip on the tip” camera at the end.\textsuperscript{23}

As a developing voice professional, you are very fortunate to be living at a time when voice diagnostics and treatment are more accurate than ever before, thanks to amazing technological advances in diagnosis and treatment of vocal problems. Voice disorders can be caught and treated early, but ultimately, you are still responsible for maintaining your vocal health. Be careful, be smart, and be vigilant with regard to your voice. You only get one.

\textsuperscript{1}Barbara M. Doscher, \textit{The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice} (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 228.

\textsuperscript{2} L. Arick Forrest, “Laryngeal Anatomy” (class lecture at The Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, Ohio, January 24, 2011).

4 Ibid.

5 Doscher, *Functional Unity*, 228.

6 Brodnitz, *Keep Your Voice Healthy*, 118.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, 119.

9 Ibid.


12 Ibid.

13 L. Arick Forrest, “Medication and the Voice” (handout from class lecture at The Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, Ohio, February 21, 2011), 1.

14 Ibid, 2.

15 Ibid, 5.

16 Ibid, 12.


18 Doscher, *Functional Unity*, 236.


21 Ibid, 279.

22 Ibid.

23 L. Arick Forrest, “Laryngeal Videostroboscopy” (Class lecture at The Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, Ohio, February 7, 2011).
Chapter 7: LEARNING A RECITAL

For many singers, the college years mark the first time that they are required to perform a solo recital of vocal literature. The skills that are learned through the process of preparing the recital are as important for the budding performer as is the singing of the recital, and while few situations are as stressful for the singer as the prospect of performing an ill-prepared recital, the well-rehearsed recital can be one of the most memorable, rewarding, and enjoyable experiences a singer can have. “Practice habits, more than anything else, make performers who they are on stage…When performance techniques are mastered, the thrill of being under the spotlights propels musicians to pinnacles of artistry.”¹ Like any other major performance event, the solo recital requires careful, early, and systematic planning and practice.

CHOOSING A DATE

One of the first steps in planning a recital is, of course, choosing a date. You must be realistic about the schedules of everyone involved, about how long it takes you to learn and memorize repertoire, and about which seasons of the year best support your vocal health.

1. **What is my schedule, and what are the schedules of my support team?** No one gives a recital alone! You will need a skilled accompanist as well as the
support of your teacher. Make sure your teacher is available on and around the date you wish to choose, as you will want and need him or her there for your dress rehearsal as well. Additionally, having the right person at the keyboard is of vital importance to your ultimate comfort and success in the recital venue. It is better to pick your second or third date choice if one of those works better for your accompanist. If you have other supporting performers involved, make sure that they are not only available on your desired date, but that it does not come during a time of year that is too hectic for them to put in the quality practice they need to do a great job. Finally, be sure that your schedule supports your desired date. If you are singing a role in the school opera production in April, don’t pick a May recital date! While it may work on paper, you will be stressed, vocally fatigued, and distracted trying to prepare both a role and a recital simultaneously.

“Musicians’ bodies are trained to adjust to huge workloads, but only if we respect certain limits. If we set ourselves a very intensive work rate, it must be for a short period only. However, the process of learning and practicing music is essentially based on repetition – so although the workload could be light, you almost always end up exceeding…the body’s limits of adaptation and tolerance.”

If you work long hours at a busy seasonal job during the holidays, don’t plan a January recital, thinking that you’ll have all of the holiday break to polish your repertoire, when realistically, that simply won’t happen. While there may be no perfect date for a busy student, there are certainly times of year that best support your own personal class and work schedule.
2. **How long will it take me to learn my repertoire?** While no one can truly cram a recital the way one might study at the last minute for a test, certainly some students learn and memorize music more quickly than do others. Self-knowledge is the key here. The prospect of doing your recital in October may seem tempting, in order to get it done early in the year, but unless you are a very quick learner, are singing repertoire you already know well, and have been taking lessons during the summer, do not pick a date so early in the school year. The theoretical convenience of an early date is not worth the stress of being forced to learn repertoire too quickly. “When performers are handed music at the last minute or don’t practice effectively, the shortage of preparation decreases their mastery and ratchets up their stress levels.” For the quick learner who already knows some of his or her repertoire going into the school year, perhaps a November or early December date will be workable. If, on the other hand, you need a lot of time to get repertoire into your brain and voice, give yourself almost a whole school year; pick a late April or May date. Either way, you can give a great recital if you work with and not against your natural abilities.

3. **What season best supports my singing?** Since your academic recitals are generally your first significant solo concert performances, and you do have some degree of control over when they happen, pick a time of year that generally fosters your best singing. “….consider the influence of the conditions that rule our daily lives. The most outstanding of these are probably weather and climate.” Are you an asthma sufferer who experiences significant difficulties managing
spring allergy symptoms? Don’t choose a spring recital date! Do January and February generally find you in the midst of one long sinus infection? Avoid a winter recital. Of course, we don’t have ultimate control over illness, but we can definitely choose dates that lend themselves to our being at our best.

**CHOOSING REPERTOIRE**

One of the most important aspects of preparing a recital is, of course, choosing repertoire. While some teachers select all recital repertoire for their students, most students have input into what they will sing, within the guidelines of their school’s historical period and language requirements. Academic recitals are, by nature, somewhat formulaic, particularly at the undergraduate level. Your school probably requires representative repertoire from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary periods, as well as repertoire in two to three languages - generally Italian, German, and French as well as English. These requirements do not, however, preclude your performing a recital of music that you love and which best suits your personality and voice. In planning a recital that both you and your audience will enjoy, consider balancing the following elements, within the confines of your school’s period and language requirements:

1. **Fast and slow repertoire** - For the sake of both your listeners and yourself, choose a balance between up-tempo and steady pieces. “Artistic preparation begins with programming. The music you choose has to be high in quality…and arranged in a lineup that excites listeners.” Everyone enjoys variety! A program
of all quick-tempo pieces will leave the audience feeling rushed and even anxious, and may incite a feeling of panic in you as the performer. You need moments to settle down on stage and relax into some slower music. On the other hand, avoid an entire program of slow repertoire. You will drain the energy of your listeners as well as your own energy.

2. **Differing dramatic moods** – Choose repertoire that allows you to express a variety of different emotions. This will hone and highlight your skills as a performer and will keep your audience engaged, while an hour of depressing and disturbing or even excessively sweet and happy texts will at some point cause them to disengage because of the monotony. Variety in this regard keeps you, the performer, from boredom as well, as you rise to the challenge of effectively switching gears within a performance. Gerald Klickstein compares a good program to a meal: “A full-length recital…typically begins with an appetizer – something bite size or easily digestible – and then centers on main courses: longer, more emotionally intense music. Finally, for dessert, performers often serve up encores.” While encores are often not permitted in academic recitals, Klickstein’s idea is valid in that “dessert” should be something memorable. He further suggests the following: “…leave your audience with a strong impact. Usually, performers step up energy toward the finish and put the loudest and liveliest music last.”

3. **Differing levels of difficulty** – Not every piece on your program should be equally taxing from a technical, musical, or dramatic standpoint. As with
scheduling, self-knowledge is very important in this regard. “Accessible repertoire is the rocket fuel of performance development. If you want…to be masterful on stage, the music you perform must not overshoot your capacity…students who insist on excessively demanding music become inundated…With their brains maxed out by just getting the notes, they perform on the edge of a precipice. In place of building security, they shore up their anxieties.”8 While your program should challenge you, remember that a recital should also highlight your best singing. Some of the repertoire should show your capabilities of agility, range, and advanced musical skills; others should remain in a more moderate range for you and feature simpler lines. This variety not only makes for a more entertaining and complete program for your audience, but gives you rest time within your program between your most taxing pieces.

LEARNING YOUR MUSIC

The prospect of learning thirty minutes to an hour of solo repertoire can feel overwhelming the first time that you prepare for a recital, particularly as you must do so against the demanding backdrop of your other classes, job, etc. The key to success here is to organize and manage your rehearsal effectively. We have already discussed the importance of giving yourself plenty of time to prepare by choosing your date wisely; now you must maximize the time that you do have.
1. **Make timelines.** Generally, being completely memorized three weeks to a month prior to your actual performance date is a good goal for singers. This leaves plenty of time for you to settle in with the repertoire, moving from having it just memorized to having it internalized and becoming very comfortable with its nuances. An observational study of singers’ memorization habits and results, conducted for an article in *Psychology of Music* showed that “the…accurate memorizers differed from the…inaccurate memorizers in that they began memorizing earlier…fast, accurate memorizers approached the task of memorizing strategically…” Work back three to four weeks from your recital date, mark this memorization goal in your calendar, and then start where you are now. If you are learning all new repertoire, the first few weeks of your practice time should be spent simply listening to it and learning it, as you would any new music, breaking it down systematically as discussed in Chapters Two through Five. Mark a date in your calendar by which you will have learned all your recital music to the point that you can sing it with accompaniment and correct pitches, phrasing, and diction. Additionally, write a memorization goal for each week in your calendar; memorize one set of music at a time. You can do these two things concurrently, as you may learn some music more quickly than the rest, and may be able to begin memorizing some pieces in a given week while learning others. If you have three pieces in one set, you may be able to memorize them in one week’s time; if you have six, you may have to split the memory
of the set between two weeks or longer. Schedule the memorization of the entire recital this way, writing down your goals for each week, consulting your calendar, and sticking to it. Again, as with so many elements of the learning process, self-knowledge is key. When making your memorization goals, be realistic about your own abilities. It doesn’t matter how long it takes you to memorize, as long as you account for it in the scheduling of your recital and in your practicing for it.

2. **Learn your hardest repertoire first.** The hardest repertoire to memorize may not be what is actually hardest musically, technically, or linguistically; it’s whatever is hardest for you. While a set of French music, for example, may be difficult to sing and feature a great deal of text, it may not be difficult to memorize for the student who took three years of French in high school and has two years of college French under his or her belt as well. The set in English, because it is long and features somewhat complicated poetry, may be more difficult for this same student to memorize. Figure out what is hardest for you and then tackle the memory of it first. Doing so will give you the confidence and motivation to memorize what is easier for you.

3. **Use mental rehearsal.** Obviously, learning your recital entails more than just memorization. You must use your daily practice time to work on technical and musical aspects of your literature. Most of your memorization will have to be done outside of your actual practice time, so you may need to set aside thirty minutes to an hour each day to work on memory alone until you have
the entire recital memorized. This may be difficult to find in your schedule, but your recital is a huge part of your degree work, and you must prioritize it. Once you have memorized your repertoire, keep it at the forefront of your mind; memory is an ongoing thing. Once you have put your repertoire in your mind, you must keep it there. Go through it mentally whenever your mind isn’t busy doing something else. Think through it in the shower, getting ready for school / work, driving, walking between classes, and just before you go to sleep at night. This mental rehearsal will take the memory work you’ve done and make the repertoire truly part of you, so that you are free to express it without the fear of a memory lapse. Madeline Bruser, concert pianist and author of *The Art of Practicing: A Guide to Making Music from the Heart*, describes her mental rehearsal this way: “…I went through pieces in my head, imagining playing each key with the correct finger, to make sure I knew every note and every fingering from memory. If I got stuck at any point in this mental process, I picked up the score, marked the place I didn’t know in colored pencil, and studied it. I remember…lying on my bed…and going through the entire piece in my head three times…None of this great effort to memorize music means anything if you can’t hear it in your mind’s ear while you mentally go through the motions. A strong auditory memory …creates a more musical performance.”¹⁰ Bruser’s attention to her fingering in her mental rehearsal holds a great lesson for singers to apply: mentally think through your technique as well as your notes, rhythms, and words!
STRUCTURING YOUR PRACTICE TIME

Though we have already discussed the suggested division of practice time in Chapter Two, your daily routine may have to be tweaked a bit when you are learning the volume of music required for a recital. For instance, you may need to reduce your vocalizing time from twenty minutes to ten, leaving you almost an entire hour to work on repertoire. You may need to increase your practice time from an hour to an hour and a half per day. That said, it may not be advisable, vocally, for you to sing through the entire program every day. Go back to your calendar, look at each week, and divide your repertoire among the days, practicing one-third to one-half of it each day, in a rotation, but including the most difficult sections of individual pieces each day. As discussed in Chapter Six, listen to your body. If your extra practicing, combined with other voice use, results in some vocal fatigue, take a day off from singing, and use the time for mental rehearsal. Don’t push through significant fatigue, or you will end up having to take much more time off. “…plot a healthy practice schedule. Prior to weighty performances, some musicians intensify their rehearsing to an extent that they incur injuries. Don’t make that mistake. Pace your learning of material, rely on mental rehearsal, and, if you need to increase your physical practice, step up no more than 10-20% per week.”¹¹ Finally, let your teacher help you structure your practice. If he or she does not make specific assignments for each lesson, then ask him or her to help you out by doing so as you prepare for your recital. Knowing that you must sing your aria and your Italian set at
your next lesson, for example, will inform your practicing of those specific pieces. As with all aspects of your practicing, you must use every advantage and tool at your disposal, including the accountability to your teacher.

USE PERFORMANCE AS PRACTICE

One of the best ways to prepare for your recital is to perform sections of it prior to the big day. Often, our instinct is to save our recital repertoire. We want to wait until it is absolutely perfected and we are one-hundred percent confident with it before performing any of it. This is a mistake. Perform recital repertoire in studio classes, getting feedback from your peers and teacher on its progress. Sing a recital piece or pieces in a departmental recital. Invite a friend or two to come to your lesson or coaching session and perform some of your recital for them. Arrange to sing at a church or retirement community. In short, take advantage of any performance opportunity that will allow you to sing your recital repertoire and see what’s going well and what still needs work. Performing your repertoire will teach you much about how you’re progressing, what technical and musical issues come to light under the pressure of performing, and how solid your memory is. “‘Public performance is a potent truth serum,’ writes pianist William Westney. If you believe that you’re prepared to perform under pressure, but in fact you aren’t, you’ll get a wake-up call when you step in front of a crowd…arrange public appearances at community venues such as churches and synagogues…When you have a major event on the horizon, plan several such performances so that you can elevate both your music making and your confidence to the highest possible levels.”
Don’t be afraid! See these types of small performances as opportunities to prepare for the larger one – your recital.

**REHEARSE IN THE RECITAL HALL**

In most cases, you will have performed in your school’s recital hall, whether for an audition, departmental recital, or studio class held there. In some cases, however, your recital will be the first time you have performed in a solo capacity in the hall where it will be held. Regardless of your prior experience in the hall, you will want to rehearse your recital there prior to performing, in order to get comfortable with its acoustics and lighting, the stage itself, and the balance between the piano and voice. It is expected at most schools that you will schedule a dress rehearsal in the hall close to the performance. If possible, try to get into the hall for at least 1 other rehearsal prior to the dress rehearsal. Schedule a lesson or coaching in the hall, simply to get comfortable singing there. It is often a big adjustment to move from the confines of your teacher’s comparatively small studio and the no-doubt even smaller practice rooms to the hall. You will need to adjust to the new space and learn to trust your technique without pushing. “As you…sing, gauge the way the space and your tone quality combine. In a reverberant venue, listen to your pitches ricochet, and calibrate your tone colors and timing in response…If your…phrases seem to land with a thud, respond by executing as usual, and don’t let…dryness rush you through your breaths. Use extra projection if needed, but resist any tendency to force.”

Try to schedule your dress rehearsal at least two days before the actual recital, if not three or four days. This may seem counter-intuitive, but you need at least a day between the
dress rehearsal and your performance to rest your voice after singing through your entire program, and to process how the dress rehearsal went. Don’t be surprised if you are very nervous at your dress rehearsal. Singing through your whole program in the hall confirms that the recital is really going to happen, and you may become anxious and excited. That’s actually a good thing. “…use your time on stage to claim the space. Imagine the seats full of people and you… in total command. Establish a sense of comfort so that when you step in front of your audience, the on-stage setting will feel welcoming and familiar.”¹⁴ You will be able to practice singing while nervous, adjusting to your increased adrenaline flow and heart rate. You may make mistakes you’ve never made before. Don’t panic! It’s better to make those errors in the dress rehearsal and get them out of the way before your performance. Following the dress rehearsal, take the next day(s) to relax and calmly think through your music and take care of yourself with regard to rest and hydration. If you have done your work, you are ready and can go into performance day with great confidence.


6 Ibid, 209.

7 Ibid, 211.

8 Ibid, 148.


12 Ibid, 201.

13 Ibid, 166.

14 Ibid.
Chapter 8: LEARNING A ROLE

As is often the case with recitals, the college years may mark the first time a singer learns and performs a role in an opera or operetta. Many vocal performance majors have sung roles in high school musicals or community theater productions, but these differ significantly from singing operatic roles in that these roles are generally only sung in English, and in that musical theatre does not require singers to sing continuously throughout the entire show, as songs are interspersed with dialogue. Opera is, of course, entirely sung, with operetta featuring a great deal more vocal work than musical theatre, as well. Adding to the magnitude of this new experience is the fact that for the university student, it must happen against the backdrop of his or her already-full class and work schedule. Clearly, the learning of a role must be carefully and systematically structured to ensure a successful performance. “Elite performers plan assiduously and prepare in depth before, during, and after their performances.” – Shirley Emmons and Alma Thomas, performance coaches

KNOW THE CHARACTER

When you audition for and win a role in any production, be it operetta, musical theater, or opera, or even scenes from one of these, as is often the case in a university setting, one of your first responsibilities is to familiarize yourself with the character you will be playing.
This is of utmost importance, because the character will, to a degree, shape even the way you sing the role. Character analysis involves several facets:

1. Context – Our tendency upon winning a role is to acquire a score and immediately leaf through it to see what scenes our character is in and how big our part actually is. Often we are then guilty of simply seeking to learn our lines and music for those scenes with very little attention to our part as it affects the entirety of the show. This is a mistake that will impair our ability to accurately prepare and portray the character. “…thorough preparation entails more than knowing your part; it also involves familiarity with an entire composition and the way your part fits within the whole.”² We would do well to heed the wisdom of the great singing teacher Giovanni Baptista Lamperti, who said, “Virtuosity consists in seeing, hearing in advance everything that we perform with ease.”³ This adage certainly applies to character study when preparing for a role. Therefore, get in the habit of taking the time to answer the following questions:

   a. What is your character’s place in the overall plot of the show?
   b. How does he or she shape the action of the storyline?
   c. Is he or she directly involved in the main plotline, or is he or she a supporting character?
   d. If your character is a supporting one, how do his or her actions affect the main characters?
e. Is your character antagonistic to the main characters or part of their support system?

f. How does your character interact with other supporting characters, and why?

2. Personality – It’s not enough to know what your character does. It’s equally important to a thorough portrayal to know why he or she behaves as he or she does, and so you must ask yourself the following questions that pertain to your character’s essential personality:

   a. Is your character happy or sad?
   
   b. Is your character funny or serious?
   
   c. Is your character angry?
   
   d. Is your character an introvert or extrovert?
   
   e. Is your character beautiful or handsome on the outside but ugly on the inside, or vice versa, or does his or her appearance and character match?
   
   f. What makes your character angry or sad?
   
   g. What makes your character happy?
   
   h. What are his or her likes and dislikes?
   
   i. What might be some of your character’s feelings about a certain situation?
   
   j. How might his or her feelings play out?
k. Does he or she change in his or her feelings and behaviors throughout the show or do they remain the same - i.e., does the character experience growth and change, or remain static?

3. Back story – This element of character analysis requires perhaps the most creativity of an actor. Sometimes in a dramatic production, we are given insight as to why characters behave as they do. Past situations that have brought them to where the action of the show finds them are often alluded to, at least, but sometimes this is not the case. A character is presented as angry, manipulative, deceptive, or sad, and we don’t know why that is, only that it is so and that we must portray those emotions and behaviors accurately. It is then helpful for the performer to create a back story for his or her character – to come up with events that may have occurred in the past to bring him or her to the point of action or emotion at which the show finds him or her. These need not be shared with anyone – they are merely a tool to enable the actor to feel what his or her character might feel and so portray it to a more thorough degree. This process may be especially important to concrete thinkers who seek systematic logic as the foundations for all actions, on and off the stage.

Is your character deceptive? Perhaps you can imagine and write out a scene or narrative in which the character lied, experienced a positive result from the deception, and thus was driven to begin a life of deceit. Is your character manipulative? Perhaps he or she found himself or herself in a situation in the past where directly asking for something was impossible or even dangerous,
and so the character learned to manipulate situations and people in order to get his or her way. The creation of back story can be extensive or simple, but it is an important part of getting to the heart of an accurate character portrayal and can even include your drawing on feelings and behaviors that you yourself have experienced as a result of past situations in your own life. “…the re-creative act may be even more intense than was the original act of creation itself…The re-creator brings to the artwork a greater degree of immediacy, fires it in the heat of instant artistic imagination, and presents it fully formed, giving it life in the present moment….Communication, the ultimate goal of performance, depends on the singer’s ability to immediately envision the poetic and dramatic situation.”

Learning to do independent research on your character in these ways is always important to a thorough performance but will be especially so when or if you find yourself working with a director who demands a great deal of input from his or her cast. Some directors prefer to dictate all actions and direct all interactions among characters according to a predetermined vision; others seek input from the cast and are open to actors experimenting with different approaches to scenes. You will be best prepared, most confident, and most impressive to your director in any situation if you come with an inner vision of your character, one that is both thorough enough to give you a strong viewpoint of your character if asked to make your own choices, and flexible enough to allow you to fit well into an existing directorial vision for the show and your part in it. “…come to
rehearsals with interpretive ideas brewing. Your groundwork will stimulate everyone’s creativity.”

WATCH AND LISTEN

In addition to delving into the specifics of your character, another of your first priorities as you begin working on a role should be to watch and listen to several different performances of it by several different artists. You are fortunate to be living at a time in which this is easier than ever, thanks to the internet, digital recordings, and YouTube. Taking advantage of these easily accessible resources will yield three main benefits:

1. **Ideas on ways to approach the character** – Watching three or four different performers tackle the same role is tremendously instructive. Along with your own character study, you will gain ideas of other ways to approach and portray the character. Watching others’ interpretations can inform your own, giving you perspective, new ideas and a sense of flexibility about the role, which will help you greatly should the director have a vision that differs from your own. You may see several different body types represented among different artists, yours included. This may give you great ideas about how to handle the body work required by the role. In his well-known book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, W. Timothy Gallwey offers this applicable advice about how to thoughtfully watch and learn without copying someone else: “…allow yourself to focus on whatever most interests you about the movements of the pro you are watching. [You] will automatically pick up elements…that are useful…and discard what is not useful.
Allow the natural learning process to lead you toward your best stroke...play around while [searching] for new stroke possibilities. In doing so, [you] will use what you can of the ‘hints’ picked up in observation of the pro.”

2. **Ideas on ways to approach the singing** – Watching several professional singers approach a difficult aria or cadenza within a role will give you ideas about how to manage it. As with body types, often slightly different voice types portray the same role – some slightly heavier or lighter, darker or brighter. Find a singer whose voice best matches yours, and watch and listen to how he or she approaches high notes, where he or she breathes during a long phrase, and how he or she shapes / modifies vowels when ascending and descending. You can then take these ideas to your lesson, ask your teacher about them, and perhaps incorporate them into your own singing.

3. **Learning the role** – As has been described in previous chapters, memorization generally requires both conscious and subconscious work. Apply both techniques as you listen and watch. Spend time watching and listening to the role with your score in hand, following along, making notes, etc. Additionally, purchase the entire show for your mp3 player or borrow or purchase a cd of it, and play it in your car, home, etc. when you are doing other things. You have learned a lot of popular music this way; you can become secure with roles in a similar fashion.
PREPARE FOR REHEARSALS

As with learning a recital, self-knowledge and the creation of timelines that coincide with your particular learning style are vital to the successful learning of a role. In many ways, this element is much easier when learning a role than it is when working on a recital, as you have only one fixed date for a recital – that of the performance. You must create your own goals along the way, whereas a role provides built-in timelines in the form of a rehearsal schedule.

1. Musical Rehearsals - Generally the first rehearsals will be musical rehearsals, where you must be concerned only with singing and not staging. As soon as you receive the conductor’s schedule for musical rehearsals, create a timeline that will lead you to a successful first rehearsal. You must come to these rehearsals already knowing your notes, rhythms, musical entrances, and text! “Veteran performers systematically prepare for each engagement. They know that their careers depend on how they perform day in and day out, and excellence is what everyone expects. Embrace a …rigorous benchmark by meticulously practicing your part between rehearsals. Never shirk your preparation and turn up for a rehearsal underprepared.” Musical rehearsals are a time for the conductor to communicate his tempi and interpretative vision, as well as an opportunity to put ensembles together, NOT a time for you to learn your music! Your music need not be fully memorized at this point, but you should be well into the
memorization process, as many directors will require you to be off book once staging rehearsals begin.

2. **Staging rehearsals** – Upon receiving your staging rehearsal schedule, plot out your memorization schedule according the scenes you will be rehearsing at each meeting. As described in Chapter Seven, make a weekly and monthly memorization calendar with target dates for each scene. Be proactive. You must have your music solidly memorized in order to be able to add the variables of acting and movement in a staging rehearsal. Accepting a role in a dramatic production is akin to committing to playing a position on a sports team. You are responsible for your part in the teamwork that will result in a win, and as the saying goes, “A team is only as strong as its weakest link.” Don’t bog down rehearsals and waste others’ time because you don’t know your material. Regardless of your innate singing and/or acting abilities, constant unpreparedness at rehearsals will ensure a poor reputation in academia and beyond, and will seriously jeopardize your chances of being cast again. “The music industry is a small relationship-driven world. Make sure you are a good colleague.”

3. **Personal goals** – We have discussed your obligation to meet your musical and stage directors’ learning and memorization expectations for rehearsals; set your own personal goals, as well. Without excess negativity or self-flagellation, following each rehearsal, do a mental evaluation of how it went. Note where you made mistakes, were uncomfortable or insecure, and what the director’s notes to
you were following rehearsal. “Before going to sleep…review your day in your mind…Ask yourself, if you had a chance to do it over again, what would you do differently? Be honest…Ask for feedback from trusted colleagues and friends. If you’re unsure of how you’re coming across or about how you handled a particular situation, ask a colleague for objective feedback.”9 Take these criticisms and build upon them for next time. It’s all right to make mistakes; it’s NOT all right to keep making the SAME mistakes. As you strive to do your best work by setting and meeting reasonable and relevant personal goals for rehearsal, you will no doubt meet and exceed your directors’ expectations as well.

**INCORPORATE YOUR CHARACTER**

Because the learning and performing of an opera, operetta, or musical theatre role is a multi-disciplinary and layered task, you may be tempted to rehearse one element at a time, focusing only on your singing, for example, while trying to get your staging learned, with very little attention to the character as a whole. This is acceptable when you are rehearsing on your own. You will, of course, have to spend time dealing with the technical, linguistic, and musical aspects of singing a role, apart from character work, but refrain from segmenting your actual musical and staging rehearsals in this way. From the first musical rehearsal, be thinking about how you can incorporate the essence of your character into everything you do, from how you express text to how you move your body, to your facial expressions. Let your dramatic alter-ego become part of you at every step in the process, so that by opening night, the character is a natural part of you.
TAKE CARE OF YOUR VOICE

A role is a natural vocal health challenge for a singer, particularly a student juggling multiple classes, work obligations, and other choral and solo singing requirements. The rehearsal process, at best, spans three to four weeks of intensive, almost-daily work, and at worst, is spread out over more than half of a semester. Without particular attention to your vocal health during this process, you may suffer significant vocal fatigue and set yourself up for serious vocal damage. “For singers who understand that prolonged phonation is dangerous, the greatest frustration is long rehearsals…Singers who are established professionals usually have control over the amount of time they rehearse, while students and pre-professionals do not…Because the singers are not fully trained in stage work, however, longer and more frequent rehearsals are often needed. Naturally, these young singers are most at risk because their instruments are not yet fully mature, nor is their technical training completed.”10 While we have already set out a detailed discussion of vocal health in Chapter Six, several aspects bear repeating in a rehearsal context:

1. **Rest.** Rest your voice, rest your body, and do all you can to maintain good overall health during your participation in a show. Take vitamins, go to bed at reasonable hours, and frequently wash your hands. Limit your speaking and
singing outside of rehearsals. Many schools limit the vocal requirements on students doing roles, such as not requiring them to do voice juries during the semester of the production, but others do not. Dovetail your vocal responsibilities as much as possible, putting an aria or two from the show on your jury list if you must perform one. Structure your daily vocal activities according to what you will be doing in rehearsal that day. If you know that you will be working on scenes in which you have a great deal of singing, warm up gradually throughout the day, sing only lightly in choral rehearsals if at all, and talk as little as possible. Do not accept many other singing engagements while working on a show. Speak to your voice teacher and your choral director, respectfully asking permission to limit your voice use if necessary. “…college age voices are…in the process of anatomical maturation. Laryngeal development is not complete until the late 20s or early 30s. The single most important trait of the young voice is its limited endurance…The tessitura must be carefully monitored, even for college age singers, and singing for too long a time is especially dangerous. Always exercise overcaution rather than undercaution.”

2. **Hydrate.** Have water with you at all rehearsals. Keep it backstage during performances, and keep yourself hydrated at all times. Performance spaces are often dry and dusty, and as we have previously discussed, adequate hydration helps to protect your voice from potential injury and to limit fatigue and flush away irritants.
3. **Mark.** In Chapter Six we defined marking and discussed the fact that if done incorrectly, it can be as harmful as over-singing. It is a technique that you must work on with your teacher in order to perfect it, but it can be an invaluable way of protecting your voice during rehearsals. Barbara Doscher, author of *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*, offers the following directives for marking:

1. Vary the dynamics and the “hook-up.” Do not stint on air flow.
2. Use frequent periods of talk-sing at approximate pitches. Stay in “character.”
3. Either avoid notes at both extremes of your range or sing them an octave lower or higher.
4. Do not whistle or sing pianissimo for extended periods of time.
5. Hum occasionally, but only for short periods. It is a relaxing device.
6. If your neck muscles become tight or your throat is very tired, you may be sub-vocalizing. Even though you are not making a sound but merely mouthing the words, your cords may be rubbing together.
7. Practice various ways of marking during your studio lessons.
8. Indicate various marking decisions in your score.
9. Always tell the conductor and the other singers when you plan to mark.\(^\text{12}\)

While it is generally understood in the professional realm that singers will mark, often directors in academic productions frown upon its use, not trusting young performers to
give adequate energy and concentration during rehearsals while marking, and not believing that they will be prepared to perform unless they sing full-out every time. Compromise is usually possible, however, particularly if you and/or your teacher explain that you are dealing with significant fatigue, illness, etc., and respectfully ask that you be permitted to mark. Remember that you will be most credible in making such requests if you are known as a responsible and prepared cast member. Even if you are permitted to mark at your discretion, be intentional in choosing the rehearsals at which you will do so. Identifying the purpose of a given rehearsal is an important factor in this decision. Is it a staging rehearsal where the director is putting actors where he or she wants them in various scenes and having them repeatedly run small segments of the action to practice these logistics? This may be a rehearsal where marking is acceptable, particularly if you are running a scene over and over again simply for the purpose of establishing traffic patterns. Technical rehearsals are also good opportunities to mark. At a technical rehearsal, the director is primarily concerned with lighting and sound cues, and making sure that the staging looks right in the lighting, as opposed to how the actors sound. Unless ill, however, you should not mark at an orchestral rehearsal, as the conductor will be seeking to work out balance between singers and the orchestra. When you are running large sections of a show, such as an entire act, for example, without stopping, it’s best to sing full-out as well, as this is an opportunity for the directors to see how the piece is progressing as a whole, including how the singers sound individually and together. Certainly, the dress rehearsal should be treated as a performance, with performance-quality vocalism.
In short, learning a role, like every other aspect of practicing, demands intentionality and independent and proactive work from a singer. While pursuing your education, you are becoming the performer you are going to be. Establish good habits now. Become a valued team member by being an independent and proactive learner.


\[^{2}\] Ibid, 116.


\[^{9}\] Ibid, 13.


\[^{11}\] Ibid, 241.

\[^{12}\] Ibid, 236.
Chapter 9: REHEARSING WITH A COACH / ACCOMPANIST

During the course of your undergraduate years, you will draw from many sources around you in your degree program. Your vocal teacher is, of course, your primary source for vocal instruction in singing techniques, with choral conductors and opera directors also potentially having input. Another indispensable team member in your vocal education is your coach / accompanist.

ACCOMPANISTS VERSUS COACHES

Any school of music will no doubt have staff accompanists available to play for studio classes, departmental recitals, juries, and recitals, yet not all accompanists are coaches. The terms are not interchangeable. An accompanist may hold degrees in piano performance or pedagogy and simply accompany for some extra cash. He or she may play very well and provide excellent piano support for your singing. You may rehearse with an accompanist a few times prior to your departmental performance, jury, or recital; if you are fortunate, the protocol at your school is to have the accompanist present at most, if not all of your lessons, and you pay for this service either through your lesson fee, or you pay the accompanist directly, as he or she is free-lancing. A good accompanist will work with you on ensemble between the voice and piano and should be able to point out glaring musical or diction errors during your rehearsals with him or her.
A coach, on the other hand, basically performs two functions for the singer: accompanying and instruction in matters of musical style, interpretation, and diction. He or she may hold performance or pedagogy degrees as well or may hold a degree in collaborative piano, an increasingly popular degree track for pianists interested in working with singers and other musicians. A key difference between an accompanist and a coach is that a coach will have studied diction so as to be able to help the singer with the pronunciation and authenticity of at least the major languages needed for the Western classical singer: English, Italian, French, and German. He or she may also have a rudimentary knowledge of vocal technique so as to help the singer tweak problematic sounds, often through the medium of diction. A coach, therefore, is a specialist, and for the student of singing, the availability of such a person at your school, who regularly works with your teacher’s students, is an ideal situation, and something that potential vocal majors should investigate when choosing a school of music at which to apply.

If your school does not have a true coach available, do not worry; most of the following information can apply to a good accompanist as well. If there is a good coach in your area, though, even if he or she does not work at your school, you may want to invest the time and money in a few sessions with him or her to gain deeper insight into your music.

**THE CASE FOR THE COACH**

A great coach is important and a worthy investment of time and money both during your tenure as a student and beyond. Most professional singers continue to have at least
occasional coachings following their degree work, because they recognize the value of such a person.

1. **A coach is different than a voice teacher.** Your teacher has much to accomplish with you in a given lesson / semester / year. He or she is seeking primarily to build your singing technique, addressing issues such as breathing, resonance, and registration. Of course he or she will also instruct you with regard to diction and interpretation of your pieces, but if you are working with a coach, much of that responsibility can be taken from your teacher, freeing him or her to really focus on your technique – a situation that is ultimately very beneficial to you as a singer. “The roles of vocal coach and voice teacher are not identical, although they frequently overlap. The coach may have a highly developed ear for vocal sounds and be able to identify the need for improving areas of technical weakness, but seldom will have the know-how for correcting vocal problems. A coach is not there to teach the singer the music, but to help him or her find freedom of musical expression through proper linguistic flow, phrase movement, textual insight, and stylistic security.”

Your coach can then be as detailed with regard to diction and interpretation as your teacher is with regard to your singing skills, giving you the most balanced and thorough training possible.

2. **Coaching enables you to experience your pieces as a whole during the learning process.** If you are in a choir, you learn your part of choral pieces in the context of the other voices, and it then makes much more musical sense to
you than your isolated line ever could. The same is true for solo repertoire, particularly art songs, which comprise much of the undergraduate repertoire. These pieces are generally crafted by composers as equal collaborations between the piano and the voice; the piano part is not merely a support to the singer, but a vital part of the expression of the piece as a whole. “The accompaniment often shares musical material with the voice; this collaboration is usually tied to the meaning of the poem. The shared material may be a motive or melodic fragment that is bandied back and forth between voice and piano, or is used afterwards as a gesture of recall. The accompaniment and voice can share rhythmic figures as well; these are often heard as ‘echoes.’ The composer may also double the vocal line in the accompaniment to intensify an emotion or illustrate the text.”

Regular coachings on your repertoire will enable you to become comfortable and expressive within the ensemble of piano and voice as you are learning the repertoire, versus putting things together just prior to a performance. This is especially vital if you lack piano skills, and it will result in much greater comfort for you during performances, as the accompaniment will feel much more organic and natural to your ears, enabling you a freedom of expression you may not be able to achieve if you are slightly unfamiliar with an accompaniment.

3. **Coachings are a practice opportunity.** This aspect of coaching is the one most germane to the purposes of this document and an important reason for
investing the time and money in a good coach. If you come to your coachings prepared, these sessions can be a vital part of your practice schedule as a whole, giving you time to run through your pieces with accompaniment, to test your memorization, and to generally become more secure with your music. In order for this to be the case, you must come to coaching sessions ready to mine the experience for all it can potentially be worth to you as a singer. This will require forethought and planning as you approach your coaching sessions.

MAKING THE MOST OF COACHINGS

1. **Come prepared.** It is not the responsibility of your coach to teach you your music. While you may have to work some things out initially with a new or difficult accompaniment, do not waste a coach’s time and your money by coming to these sessions not knowing your repertoire, at least well enough to do a rough read-through of it. On the other hand, don’t be afraid to try a newer piece with accompaniment at these sessions. You may make errors, but sometimes in repertoire with difficult tonalities, singing with the accompaniment, even when it is somewhat unfamiliar, can help you make sense of your own line.

2. **Come with an agenda.** As we discussed in Chapter Three regarding your voice lessons as they relate to technique, you will gain from your coachings what you put into them. Come to your coaching sessions
knowing what you want to work on that day. Don’t expect your coach to set the agenda; be proactive and self-propelled. Own your vocal education. You may want to divide your music into the following three categories when planning your coaching sessions, and then divide the hour accordingly:

a. **Music you know well** – You may want to run some things in your coachings, particularly as you approach a performance. Plan to simply sing through several pieces to become comfortable with the accompaniment and test your memory. You may want to begin and / or end your session with this category of music.

b. **Music with trouble spots** – Know where your trouble spots are in your music, and at a coaching (versus a lesson where you will want to address difficulties with your singing technique), plan to address difficulties you may be having with diction or interpretation. If you have spots like this in several pieces, plan to tackle only those spots in those pieces. This approach will make your sessions efficient, enabling you to cover the maximum amount of material possible.

c. **New music** – Choose a few pieces that you want to read through for the first time with accompaniment. You should not be sight-reading – these should be pieces you’ve listened to and
sung through. Trying new things out with accompaniment will be a vital part of setting up your practice time beyond the coaching, as you will be able to identify what spots will be difficult for you with the accompaniment, and at what points the accompaniment supports your pitches. Knowing what the piano is doing is important to your understanding of a piece as a whole. “Figures in the piano can set the emotional or dramatic mood of the song, or become a participant in the poetic texture…The texture may be thought of as the fabric of the song, woven to support and define the poetry. It can be dense and thick or light and clear, conceived in linear form or chordal form. All of these variations create different sounds and colors, and, when coupled with the words, can transmit different images to the listener.”

3. **Plan to record your music as needed.** Obviously, your coach / accompanist cannot be with you each time you practice. As with your voice lessons, you may want to record your coaching sessions on your smart phone or digital recorder for reference during your practice sessions. You may want to use part of your coaching session to record your coach / accompanist playing through a particularly difficult accompaniment without your singing it, so that you have something with which to rehearse. Let him or her know ahead of time that you
want to do this, so that he or she can practice the piece first. This will enable you to get the best and most accurate recording possible for your practice use.

4. **Ask questions and make notes.** A good coach, like a good teacher, welcomes your questions. Make note of questions you have between your coaching sessions, so that you can bring them to your next session and get answers. Write your texts out in International Phonetic Alphabet and bring them to your coachings to show your coach, so that he or she can confirm and / or correct your diction. This will keep you from learning wrong diction that you will later have to correct, which is much more difficult that taking the time to learn it correctly in the first place. When your coach makes interpretive or diction suggestions and corrections, write them down in your music. Do NOT assume you will remember them later. If he or she says something that you find particularly helpful, write it down as a quote to refer to later. Conversely if he or she says something that you don’t understand, ask for clarification. Your coach, like your teacher, wants to help you, so foster good communication with him or her by asking questions.

5. **Use your coaching time as practice time.** This is especially vital as you prepare for a performance such as a recital or a role. You may want to take a coaching session and run as much of your recital as you can, seeing how you are doing with regard to memorization. Run
pieces about which you are less confident several times to become increasingly comfortable with the tonalities of the accompaniment and with your entrances. You will leave such a session knowing exactly what you are most comfortable with and what still needs work so that you will be able to structure your week of practice more efficiently as a result.

**CHOOSING A COACH**

We have seen that a coach’s role in your vocal education is important. Hopefully, you are part of a music community that offers some choice with regard to coach / accompanists. Even if your choices are somewhat limited, you will want to consider the following criteria when choosing a coach or accompanist, as this relationship is an important part of your study:

1. **Personality.** As with so many aspects of learning to sing, self-knowledge is an important factor in choosing a coach. Your coach is someone with whom you must be comfortable; he or she is an ally and friend during your vocal study and will be onstage with you during your studio classes, departmental, and recital performances. If you are a reserved, calm, and quiet person, you may need a coach with a big and intense personality that will help bring out the fire in your singing. If, on the other hand, you are an intense, type-A person yourself, you may benefit from the calming influence of a more laid-back person.
who can help you relax about your performing and keep you calm under pressure. The bottom line is that as with your voice teacher, your coach must be someone whom you trust, no matter what his or her personality.

2. **Piano skills.** Your coach / accompanist must have excellent piano skills. He or she must be able to tackle the demands of difficult literature with precision and musicality. Before committing to work with someone, listen to him or her in performance with other singers, so that you have an idea about his or her skills. Listen to the recommendations of your teacher and upperclassmen whose singing you respect.

3. **Language skills.** In addition to piano skills, your coach / accompanist must have great ears. Choose someone whose knowledge of language is strong. If there is no such person available at your school, talk to your teacher and / or call a local or nearby opera company to get a recommendation of someone you could work with on at least an occasional basis. You will learn much, not only about the pronunciation of foreign languages, but about the nuances that lend authenticity to each, and how to incorporate them into your singing.

As with other aspects of singing, you must own this choice, and be proactive in this relationship. A great relationship with a great coach is one of the best tools in learning to become the best singer you can be.


3 Ibid, 14.
Chapter 10: WHEN PRACTICING IS NOT THE PROBLEM

While many of your problems as a singer may result from a lack of knowledge about how to practice your repertoire, how to prepare for singing events, and how to manage your time and vocal health, there are times in your singing journey when you have practiced thoroughly, mindfully, and intentionally, yet still find success on a given song, set, or aria to be discouragingly elusive. What then? You may at this point conclude that perhaps practicing is not the problem. No document on practicing can be complete without an examination of how to manage this frustrating and difficult situation.

CAUSES

You may be asking yourself why you cannot seem to get a particular piece comfortably settled into your voice. Having practiced for hours, taken every suggestion proffered by your teacher, and thoroughly dissected every aspect of a song, you are understandably anxious about your lack of progress and may even be questioning your ability as a singer. At this point, it may be time for you and your teacher to conclude that practicing is not the solution for this particular issue, and that the piece, set, aria, or even role may simply not be right for you, at least not at this time. You may arrive at this place through many different scenarios. Perhaps your teacher assigned you the piece thinking that it would be a great fit for you, and believing that you could rise to the challenge. Perhaps it is an aria
that you lobbied to be able to work on, against the backdrop of a hesitant but eventually compliant teacher. However you arrive in this situation, it is a frustrating one, and you need to understand that you have not failed as a singer. Several other causes may be to blame and you and your teacher must consider them.

1. **The ranges are too extreme.** Sometimes a piece may simply reach too high or low for your current abilities. You may be a young tenor who has recently mastered a great G5, but the aria you are working on has three A5’s, and while you are on the cusp of managing that note comfortably, you simply are not ready to do so yet. Perhaps you are a soprano with strong and clear coloratura facility in your highest notes, but the piece features several notes that drop below middle C, and you cannot sing them with any strength at all. These are common issues for young singers who are still working out the management of notes that will eventually be effortless but are currently difficult and even impossible to consistently produce.

2. **The piece lies consistently in too high or low a range.** “Range is the extent of a voice, the upper and lower limits of frequency. Within that range, there is a certain compass in which the voice performs with special ease of production and sound. That compass of notes is called the tessitura.”¹ In other words, the tessitura of a voice is the area of the range in which it is most comfortable for the longest amount of time. Therefore, you cannot assume that because a piece fits within the parameters of your range, it will automatically be a good
fit for you; the range in which most of it is written is a more important gauge. Mozart’s aria “Non so pui cosa son,” from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, for example, is often given to young singers. In the opera this aria is sung by the character Cherubino, a young pubescent boy, and this role is played by a woman, usually a mezzo-soprano. The aria’s highest note is G6, a note toward the top of a young mezzo-soprano’s range, but certainly doable. The piece as a whole, however, lies high. Most of the aria sits between D6 and G6, a *passaggio* area that can be quite fatiguing for a young singer to navigate. Therefore, while a teacher may assign this aria to a young mezzo, thinking it to be well within her range capacity, which it may be, it can also be a very fatiguing piece for young singers whose endurance in a high range is not yet established. This is just one example of a piece in which the range may not be the best fit for a singer at a given time in his or her development, even if it is within his or her voice type.

3. **The weight of the piece is wrong for the voice.** Singing voices are categorized according to *fach*. The German word, *fach*, and its plural, *fächer*, are translated as “compartment,” or “subject of study,” or within a singing context, “vocal specialization.” “The *fach* system is a method of classifying singers, primarily opera singers, according to the range, weight, and color of the voices.”\(^2\) Singers use the term interchangeably with “voice type” or “category.” Complicating these determinations is the fact that differences in weight and color (tonal quality) of voices create the need for subcategories.
within the basic categories of soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, and bass, and these weight / color issues are often a point of difficulty in choosing repertoire for the young voice. Young singers have developmental and technical issues that can lead to wrong conclusions about fach if that determination is made too early. Range and tessitura troubles are perhaps more easily identified than are vocal weight issues, but singing a piece wrongly weighted for your voice can cause significant fatigue. A teacher may, for example assign a young, light lyric soprano Schubert’s beloved dramatic lied, “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” believing that Schubert’s lieder will be a great introduction to singing in the beautiful German language. He or she chooses this piece hoping its long lyric lines will help the student work on her breath management. It is, after all, standard soprano repertoire. The diligent student practices regularly and employs all the technique of which she is capable, but her light voice simply cannot sustain the weighty lines of the piece, much of which is written in the middle of the soprano range, and is therefore best suited to a heavier voice capable of more sound on middle and low pitches. As a result, she suffers significant vocal fatigue after each practice session. Her light voice would be much better suited to a different Schubert lied, perhaps “Die Forelle,” “Lachen und Weinen,” or “Der Musensohn,” all lovely standard lieder that lend themselves to the weight of her voice.
Professional singers are cautious about this issue. Lily Pons, a soprano whose career spanned forty-four years reflected, “I have never understood why so many colleagues do not realize their own limitations. I always knew mine. My voice was like a flute, and I always stuck to the coloratura repertoire, which was the only right one for me.”

Tenor Juan Diego Florez states, “You are born with a voice, and that voice is meant to sing a certain fach. I have a light voice. You see tenors who sing light repertoire move into lower, heavier repertoire, and although maybe they can do it, you always know it is not right for that voice.”

Soprano Renee Fleming says this regarding her consideration of weighty repertoire for performance: “Is the orchestration going to cover me in such a way that I can’t give the music what it needs? If [the role has been sung by predominantly] spinto or dramatic sopranos, the part is probably not right for me. If [it] fits into my vocal category, then I’ll look at it more seriously.”

If professionals are cautious regarding the issue of weight in choosing repertoire, so much more must the young singer and his or her teacher exercise care in considering this issue. Says Richard Miller, “It is rarely possible for a teacher of singing or a vocal coach precisely to pinpoint a singer’s fach during the early years of vocal training…Accurate vocal categorization within the overall, major divisions will emerge as both technical security and age move forward.”

Cautions otolaryngologist Dr.
Robert Sataloff, M.D., “Both singer and teacher must resist the impulse to show off the voice in works that are...not suited to the singer’s voice...Attempts to make the voice something that it is not...are frequently harmful.” It is clear then, that singers and teachers must err on the side of caution when selecting repertoire for the collegiate singer.

We see that a mismatch of singer to song can be a result of range, tessitura, or weight issues. What then, are the specific clues, other than general frustration, that a piece may be wrong for you because of one or more of these factors?

**CLUES**

1. **The tonal coloring does not sound or feel natural.** The voice of a singer executing repertoire that is right for him or her will have resonance, tone quality, and registration events that coincide with the characteristics of his or her specific *fach* within the general categories of soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, and bass. If you are working in a tessitura other than the one to which your voice is inclined, the sound will never be properly balanced or free-sounding. In general, higher voices trying to sing in too low a tessitura will lack a brilliance of tone, and the voice may sound and feel weak. Increases in volume will be limited by the fact that the voice is not operating in the acoustical spectrum to which it is best tuned, and the vocal cord structure is not thick enough to produce sustained singing at a loud dynamic.
Lower voices working in too high a tessitura will sound strained; the vibrato may be compromised into a stridency, because the voice is in over-drive mode, unable to resonate and vibrate freely, as all its capacity is being channeled into simply getting the notes out. A heavier voice trying to sing light repertoire that requires great agility may sound breathy and unsupported, as the singer tries to fit his or her sizeable sound into lines configured for smaller instruments. A light voice trying to meet the demands of heavier literature, with its sustained, sweeping lines, may sound strident and forced, as it lacks the natural color to effectively and beautifully produce this kind of linear singing.

2. **The singer is working too hard to produce the sound.** This is a tricky consideration for student and teacher, because sometimes, a student working too hard to sing a particular piece is simply displaying poor technique, which, when resolved through instruction and practice, will result in greater ease of singing – an issue unrelated to the literature. If you have mastered technique to a certain degree, however, and are generally consistent in its application to appropriate repertoire, a sudden inability to sing a certain piece correctly with regard to technique, even after much practice, is clue that perhaps it is a poor fit for your voice. “Vocal art…incorporates the principles of beauty, strength, and health…These characteristics are the result of a freely-operating vocal instrument.” Whether your voice is high or low, small or large, when you are working with and not against your instrument in terms of repertoire, there will
be physical effort, concentration, and control, but not undue effort or strain. If you are working outside the natural bounds of your voice, “in order to comply with the aesthetics that determine coloration in each fach…the basic function of the instrument must be altered.”

Signs of this altering may include “visible tension in the neck / laryngeal region, jaw, tongue, or even the entire upper body.”

Pushing a lighter or lower voice into singing too high or too heavily upsets the balance of breath and vocal cord closure, and in such cases the singer may demonstrate a sense of windedness as he or she reaches the ends of phrases. Breathing may seem very worked, and the singer’s face and / or neck may appear flushed from the strain. Additionally, the singer may be consistently fatigued after even a limited amount of singing, another clue to the fact that the voice is working too hard to produce the sound. “When [vocal folds undergo] extensive, vigorous, and / or inefficient use, one of the first signs that…singers observe [is] an increase in effort, a sense of needing to work harder – in the breathing and neck-throat muscles – in order to make their voices respond.”

Because of the overworking of the instrument required just to make sound, a singer working on the wrong literature will feel hampered in his or her ability to sing expressively, because all effort will have to go toward simply getting the notes out.

How then, should you proceed if you believe yourself to be working on a piece that feels wrong for your voice?
WHAT TO DO

1. **Talk to your teacher.** Your teacher is no doubt noticing your struggles with the piece and perhaps your negativity / hesitancy toward it. Communicate your feelings to him or her; explain the specifics of your struggle. If your teacher knows that you are practicing regularly and that you are a responsible and engaged student, he or she is much more likely to take your complaint seriously than if you are known as a lazy or uncommitted student. When you bring up the issue to your teacher, you may find that he or she too has been having doubts about the piece being a good fit for you. Respectfully ask permission to set the piece aside, at least temporarily. If you have a good relationship with your teacher, you can no doubt work this out between you. Teachers want their students to be successful and to put their efforts into learning music that facilitates success.

2. **Stay positive.** Often a failure to thrive on a certain piece, particularly if it is one that you like and particularly want to sing, can make you feel depressed or discouraged about your ability. Don’t allow this to happen! There is a degree of experimentation in learning to sing; it is a process, a journey, and not an exact science. An inability to master a certain piece at a given time in your development does not indicate failure on your part. If you have practiced thoroughly, but a piece is simply not working for you, it’s all right to move
on. Focus on what you are doing well, and be willing to put away the problematic piece, understanding that while it may be a permanent misfit for your voice, you may be able to go back to it after a few more years of training and master it. Learning to sing requires flexibility in your perceptions of your vocal abilities and voice type. A rigid attitude toward learning will almost always result in frustration for both you and your teacher.

3. **Learn from the experience.** Working on a piece for a time and then setting it aside does not mean that you have wasted your time. Use the experience as a springboard to work smarter. Identify, with the help of your teacher, what about the piece did not work for you. Was it too heavy or light? Too high or too low? Too sustained or too florid? Answering these questions will bring you closer to identifying your specific *fach*, a quest that sometimes takes years to solidify. If you are assured by your teacher / coach that the piece will ultimately be a good fit for you later, figure out what areas of your technique need to be addressed for that to happen, and begin moving in that direction. Time is never wasted if learning takes place. Every singer will have successes and failures along his or her journey. Find a way to use the information gained to your advantage.


3 Ibid, 9.


8 Miller, *Art of Singing*, 38.

9 Ibid, 37.


Almost every performer will deal with performance anxiety at some time in his or her career. Rare is the performer whose heart does not beat a bit faster as he or she waits in the wings of an auditorium for his or her entrance on stage to perform in some capacity.

“A performance is an intimate act. The specific content of our thoughts may not be perceived by the audience, but the blood and adrenaline running through our body communicate to them…in spite of a tuxedo or long gown, a performer can feel emotionally naked. The ordered formality of presenting ourselves to the public accentuates the rawness we feel inside, the tenderness of our nerves.” For some singers, the rush of adrenaline that causes the heart to pound, the hands to perspire, and the throat to become a bit dry, is the extent of the manifestation of their nerves prior to and during performance. For others, even talented vocalists with well-developed technical and artistic abilities, performance anxiety can be a debilitating and frustrating problem. There is, of course, inherent risk in live performing, and as a performer, you must acknowledge and make peace with this fact. You cannot control every aspect of a live performance. Unforeseen distractions from the audience may occur, you may encounter a slight memory slip, dust may irritate your throat and cause troublesome phlegm, a high note may not come out just right, or your pianist may make an error. “Our job as performers is to accommodate everything that arises in our awareness – our extraneous thoughts,
coughs from the audience, the lights, our fear, and our excitement, as well as the music.”

These things are part of a performer’s possible reality. Whatever your reaction to the pressures of performing, though, be assured that there are steps you can take, through your practice procedures, to give yourself the best chance for a great performance despite your anxieties and potential impediments.

**CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN**

We have discussed some of the aspects of a performance that are out of a singer’s ultimate control, but there are ways to control much about your performance experience through creative and intentional practicing. We have already discussed many of these elements earlier in the document but will review them here.

1. **Prepare.** The best defense is a great offense. This is absolutely true in the realm of performing. The best way to ensure a great performance is to be thoroughly prepared. This means knowing your music thoroughly, having it completely memorized, having it technically prepared, and having all breaths marked, rehearsed, communicated to your accompanist, and built into your body through the intentional and specific practice procedures discussed throughout this document. Good enough is not good enough when it comes to preparing for live performance. You must program your pieces into your body, so that you are capable of going on auto pilot, should your nerves or other factors distract you during a live performance. We discussed memorizing techniques in Chapter Seven; one additional technique bears
discussion here. You will not be prepared to go on auto pilot unless you have practiced going on auto pilot, so make it an aspect of your memorization to allow your song(s) to go through your mind while intentionally doing something else. Think through a piece while simultaneously watching a television show, listening to a conversation, or skimming a news article. If you successfully arrive at the end of your song without having to think hard about what comes next in a particular section, then that piece is solidly memorized. In other words, as you approach a performance, your music should be not only in your mind, committed to memory, but on your mind, as a priority item of focus. Ironically, often students who are nervous about a performance, but who channel their anxieties into this type of preparation, fare much better on performance day than do their counterparts who are cavalier about an upcoming performance but are struck by panic when it arrives, due to a lack of mental preparation. Shirley Emmons and Stanley Sonntage in their book, THE ART OF THE SONG RECITAL, give the following sage advice specifically to singers:

“Remember that a singer has considerably more responsibility than an instrumental musician…you are responsible for language, with all of its attendant complications and you have the psychological distraction of facing an audience straight on, without an instrument between. One study shows that any singer in a stage production with costumes, props, sets, a conductor, and other singers is at each moment balancing forty psychological processes. In a recital, without any of these things, a singer is responsible for at least twenty psychological processes…It is exceedingly important that the things that can be made automatic be made so…The conscious mind has to be free to grapple with vocal technical skills, dramatic sincerity, and those musical ensemble questions that cannot be automatic.”

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2. **Practice being nervous.** The body’s reaction to performance anxiety can play out in irritating and distracting ways, hampering your ability to breathe deeply, to relax your posture, or to keep your voice steady and on the breath line. Because the breath / tone production relationship is often compromised when you are nervous, sometimes this plays out in intonation problems as well. One important tool for managing these annoying, involuntary symptoms of nervousness is to purposely create them so that you can practice singing well in spite of them. While you may never completely overcome your body’s reaction to performance anxiety, that reaction can become familiar and therefore more easily managed, so be proactive! Instead of fearing what your nerves might do to your singing, create small performance opportunities prior to the big recital, role performance, or audition. You will be amazed at the difference in preparation that you will feel as you approach your ultimate performance. “The habits that enable you to perform expressively in public can only be instilled through practice….Veteran performers…correlate everything they do in practice with their creative intentions in concert.”

Suggestions for simulating performance energy include the following:

a. With your teacher’s permission, invite some friends to your voice lesson and sing through some or all of your performance repertoire for them.

b. Ask a friend or two to join you in the practice room for a few minutes while you sing the hardest part of your aria or song in front of them.
c. Avail yourself of every opportunity to perform your repertoire prior to the ultimate performance, both on and off campus. This would include studio classes and departmental recitals, master classes, and performing at retirement homes and / or churches.

d. Sing for your family at home.

e. Inquire as to whether your high school alma mater would allow you to perform a concert there as a fundraiser for the music department.

3. **Perform in the space as often as possible.** Your school may have strict rules about use of recital and concert venues. They may only be available for dress rehearsals and performances, and if so, you will have to make good use of your dress rehearsal, as discussed in Chapter Seven. If possible, however, sign out the recital hall for a coaching with your accompanist or for your voice lesson. “At first you may experience a disorientation. For some reason it does not sound or feel as it did in the studio. This anxiety can be dispelled in short order…sing again and acquaint yourself with the new sensation. It is quite possible that some halls will never give you the comfortable acoustic sensations you were accustomed to elsewhere. Practice coping with the disquieting sensations until they interfere minimally with your technical control.”

As mentioned above, be aware of performance opportunities that take place in the space in which you will ultimately be performing, and sign up for that departmental recital or master class. The space will become a familiar and less-intimidating venue in which to sing, and you will become
accustomed to how your voice sounds and feels in relation to the room’s acoustics.

**CREATE A ROUTINE**

As we have mentioned, live performance features many elements which are out of the singer’s control. Therefore, a pre-performance routine can be a soothing way to get yourself prepared for your performance.

1. **Know yourself.** As with so many other aspects of practicing and performing, you must operate within the parameters of your personality as well as your personal reaction to the stress of performing. You may have a friend, for instance, who can arrive for a performance with just minutes to spare, chat backstage with others, then walk out and sing very well, while you may need calm, quiet, isolation, and an early arrival at the hall in order to set yourself up for success. Some singers enjoy mingling with and / or listening to other singers at an open audition. Others prefer to keep to themselves, staying in the zone until performance time and keeping themselves unaware of who has sung prior to their own audition. There is not a right or wrong approach; you must work within the confines of what works best for you. Do not feel pressured to adapt to someone else’s pre-performance routine. Develop your own.

2. **Facilitate calm.** Set yourself up for success. This process starts well before you walk out on stage to perform your recital, role, or audition. If, like many others, your school has the unfortunate practice of requiring your attendance in class on
the day of your recital or role performance, and you find this too stressful, schedule a Saturday or Sunday recital performance so that you will have time during the day to prepare. Obviously, if you have a role in a show with a weeknight opening, this may not be possible, but where you can control this, do so. Get plenty of sleep the night before, and drink a lot of water during performance day. Talk as little as possible. Take time to lie down and relax; nap if you can, but if not, simply lie down and mentally go through the task at hand. Warm up carefully, allow enough time to dress and get to the performance space so that you arrive relaxed, ready, and not hurried. Do everything you can to keep yourself calm, focused, and ready to sing.

**COACH YOURSELF**

Do not underestimate the value of self-talk prior to, during, and following a performance. Your inner monologue has a greater impact on your feelings about your singing than you might think. Yes, there are ways nerves play out involuntarily, but we can control much about how we feel going into a performance. View yourself as a great coach, cheering yourself on to victory by encouraging yourself during the game.

1. **Before your performance, choose to be calm.** If, as you approach performance time, your brain begins spiraling out of control, playing out every possible negative scenario, stop! Take a breath, and begin to replace those negative thoughts with good ones, imagining your best possible singing and an overwhelmingly positive audience response. Stretch and breathe

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deeply for a few moments. Distract yourself from harmful thoughts by doing something relaxing – take a walk, read a book, have a snack, pray or meditate. Remind yourself that you have done all you can to prepare, that those coming to your performance like you and want you to succeed, and that those who don’t do not matter! Think about how lucky you are to get to sing, to perform beautiful literature, and to share your art with others. “In short, keep your mind on what you are going to do and not on what might happen.” ⁶ In other words, take control of your thoughts as you approach performance, rather than allowing your thought processes to control you.

2. During your performance, talk to yourself on stage. “Self-talk almost invariably influences your mood. By becoming aware of your self-statements and bringing them in line with your true intentions, you engender constructive thoughts and emotions.” ⁷ As you walk out and take your bow, smile, and tell yourself that you are fine, you are ready, and that this will be fun! Take a moment before you begin - to breathe, to think through your first lines, and to settle yourself. “Composing yourself this way sets the tone for the audience. They think, ‘This person’s taking time to settle down and breathe. I can, too.’ They need transition time after their day and after talking among themselves.” ⁸ As you sing, think what comes next and remind yourself of little technical tweaks that you have practiced, coaching yourself to do them and to trust yourself. If something goes awry, do not allow yourself to dwell on it, but immediately begin focusing on what comes next, telling yourself
that you are all right, that the moment has passed, and that you must go on.

“If... you hear yourself say something like ‘I’m a wreck,’ identify the statement as rubbish, mentally say, ‘That’s ridiculous,’ and replace it with ‘I can handle whatever comes up. I fear nothing.’”  Sing now, process later!

Keep your performance self-talk positive; mentally cheer yourself on.

3. **After your performance, process and release.** It is natural, healthy, and necessary for us as performers to think through our performances, assessing what went right, what went wrong, what was great, and what could have been better. We must do this at the right time, however. Do not immediately listen to your performance. Usually, recordings are not available immediately following your performance, and this is a good thing. You may have an immediate positive or negative mental reaction to your singing, but allow yourself to think through the pros and cons of your performance over the span of a few days or even weeks. As you move further out from your performance, you will become more objective. The purpose of this process is not self-flagellation, but a means of acquiring knowledge about how to prepare for the next singing opportunity. We all make mistakes. We all have successes. We must learn from them and use the information for next time. You may even want to write some things down – what you liked about your singing, what you didn’t like, what sounded good and why, and what didn’t sound so great, and why not. (See Appendix F for sample performance evaluation forms.)
Once you have gleaned this information, it is important that you not only channel it into more-informed practicing for next time, but that you release the performance rather than continuing to obsess over it and to allow yourself to become discouraged or over-confident. It is what it is. You have sent it out, and you cannot take it back, so let it go. Accept it and move on. Performing is risky, thrilling, and rewarding. It requires great resiliency, a quality that is developed over time as we learn from and accept what we have done and move on to greater things. The great cellist Jacqueline du Pré spoke eloquently to this issue: “Music making is a never-ceasing process of change and progress. One never arrives at the perfect performance but nevertheless draws increasing knowledge and insight and enthusiasm from every moment.”10

2 Ibid, 239.


5 Emmons and Sonntag, Song Recital, 161.

6 Ibid, 162.


8 Bruser, Art of Practicing, 238.

9 Klickstein, Musician’s Way, 169.

10 Ibid, 205.
Chapter 12: OTHERS ON PRACTICING

In one sense, the life of a musician, his pursuit of excellence, his performances, and his resultant career path make for a lonely journey. We enter the practice room alone, walk on stage alone, and must forge our own paths as singers. Singers and musicians, however, wherever they find themselves, do form a community – a marketplace of ideas, of differing interpretations of the same literature, and of differing ways to reach similar goals. We can and should learn much from one another as we pursue our own goals. In that spirit, this final chapter discusses the results of a practice survey taken by group of eleven musicians that included seven singers - four professionals, one graduate student, and two long-time teachers of singing, as well as three pianists and one flutist, as there is much for singers to learn from the often more-structured practice procedures of instrumentalists.

ON FREQUENCY AND LENGTH OF PRACTICE SESSIONS

Not surprisingly, the pianists and flutist surveyed reported practicing for two to five hours per day, an amount of time not generally feasible for singers. Singers reported times varying from thirty minutes to two hours per day. Those singers who reported longer practice times, however, did include in that time listening to new repertoire and working on trouble spots versus solid singing. Both singers and instrumentalists championed the value of short, frequent sessions: “I’m not afraid to have short spurts…say, twenty
minutes. I figure it’s better than nothing.” (Dr. Suzanne Newcomb, pianist and piano teacher) “Singers should practice daily, even if only for fifteen minutes…Ideally, the time is more profitable if broken up into shorter periods, such as fifteen to thirty-minute segments. Additional time up to an hour should be spent translating, researching song background, and memorizing.” (Dr. Karen Peeler, singer and voice teacher)

ON SCHEDULING PRACTICE TIME

Eight out of eleven participants surveyed reported setting aside specific times for practice. “I literally reserve time in my calendar for my practice.” (Ed Bak, pianist) “Because I have a set schedule with school, I set aside time within my schedule to practice every day.” (Natalee McReynolds, graduate student in voice) “I have found if I set a certain time aside each day to practice, it is more likely that it will get done.” (Erica Colopy, singer) While the other three admitted that they simply fit practice in when possible, all of those three are established professionals with many years of practicing providing a solid foundation for their current work, and all three have a general plan for when practicing occurs – evenings, weekends, etc. All participants spoke to the importance of scheduling practice time during their best time of day with regard to alertness. Over half indicated that morning or early afternoon facilitated their best work, while the remainder finds evening practice to be optimum, speaking to the importance of self-knowledge, already referred to several times in this document.
ON BUILDING TECHNIQUE THROUGH PRACTICE

We discussed in Chapter Three the importance of building technique as we practice. All survey participants indicated that technical concerns are high on their lists of priorities within a given practice session. Most set aside ten to twenty minutes per day or practice session for technical work targeting agility, legato, quiet singing, and ease of registration. Dr. Kimberlee Goodman, flutist, indicated that seventy-five percent of her practice time is spent on technique. All surveyed spoke of targeting their technical work to whatever repertoire they plan to rehearse in a given session, breaking down difficult technical passages into small sections, and even incorporating difficult portions of repertoire into their warm up, indicating that effective rehearsal is intentional from the outset. “I plan my warm-ups based on what [repertoire] I will be singing (coloratura, high tessitura, etc.) and start to work my voice into sections of music while warming up.” (Dr. Laura Portune, singer and voice teacher) “Extract difficult intervals, passages, or scales and make a vocalise out of them. Change keys and tempi to master the difficult passages. Start slow, perhaps with a metronome, and then get gradually faster. Work in small units, gradually adding a new pattern or measure; learn from back to front, as well as front to back. Work…in small units of time, several times a day. You are training muscle and nerve memory here, and repetition is essential.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) “I’ll try to figure out the most effective placement and what vowel shape I want. I’ll often sing the phrase a half step or full step below where it’s
written and then slide up...For example, if the B-flat needs to ‘live’ in the same place as the preceding A-flat, I’ll lower the phrase...then slide up [by half step] to the B-flat.” (Aaron Ramey, singer)  Additionally, these performers and teachers recognize the value of patience and persistence in technical work, trusting that it will eventually pay off. “I have many ways I can break down a technical passage: rhythms, isolating, metronome creep. I always notice the benefit of technical work the next day. I don’t expect immediate results.” (Dr. Suzanne Newcomb)

ON MASTERING PIECES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

All singers surveyed championed the practices of initially learning the notes and rhythms separately from foreign-language texts, of speaking the text at various tempi, and of writing into their music both International Phonetic Symbols and a translation, topics covered in Chapter Four. Several spoke as well to the issue of not only working on the pronunciation of foreign words but on the cadence and authenticity of the language with regard to both physical structure and poetic intent. “Rhythm is always the key here. Approach the foreign language by speaking in rhythm, always with appropriate breathing points. Make sure the tongue is working autonomously when appropriate. Make sure the lips and muscles surrounding the lips are used appropriately and modified as necessary for the high range.” (Eileen Davis, singer, voice teacher, and diction expert) “Write literal translations in your music...so that you learn meaning as you learn words. Say the poem with meaning, phrase by phrase, and then apply those same inflections to your singing.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) Natalee McReynolds offers this
advice from a venerable coach, applicable not only to foreign-language pieces, but to all vocal repertoire: “I was challenged by Martin Katz to look at the music only after analyzing the text and interpreting the poetry to see if my interpretation of the poem matched up with the music…Find the words that the composer seems to highlight. Speak the text freely, as a poem, still highlighting the appropriate words.” Dr. Laura Portune emphasizes the importance of early work on pieces in foreign languages: “I…find that I need to memorize the words earlier than I do English…to sing them properly.”

**ON SINGING WHEN VOCALLY ILL**

As has been discussed earlier in the document, learning how to manage your practicing when vocally unable to do your best work is of critical importance for a singer. Several of those surveyed emphasized the importance of doing all you can to avoid illness in the first place, by taking care yourself, being alert to your body’s warning signs, and by dealing with them appropriately. “I am very proactive about treating a cold…guafenisen…Zicam…nasal rinse, etc.…if a cold, especially one with a cough, lasts over a week without signs of slowing down, I will go to a doctor.” (Dr. Carolyn Redman, singer and voice teacher) “I do everything I can to maintain my vocal health…I hydrate in dry environs…I SLEEP.” (Aaron Ramey) All spoke of continuing to practice, but changing their methods in order to preserve their voices. “I spend time on everything else besides the singing…diction, phrasing, listening to recordings / watching other singers, character work, reading up on the poet/composer, etc.” (Natalee McReynolds) “Take passages an octave lower; do not sing over twenty minutes. Try to
do mental work.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) **Several spoke to the benefits of taking time off from singing when a hiatus is truly mandated by illness.** “I try not to sing when I’m ill unless it is impossible to cancel. I find that I rework my technique to compensate for being sick, and I therefore fall further behind by practicing rather than just taking time off.” (Dr. Laura Portune) “If you cannot phonate, or if the throat aches, do not sing. If you are coughing, get medicine and do not sing. If phonation is labored, do not sing.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) “I firmly believe that singing while vocally compromised is counterproductive ninety-nine percent of the time.” (Aaron Ramey)

**ON LEARNING A RECITAL**

All participants emphasized the importance of early planning for a recital, with start time for practicing the material varying from six months to a year out. “…depending on…length and complexity, I will learn the new work one year or 10 months before the concert, memorize it, put it away, let it rest, bring it out again…perform it, retire it again, then one month before the concert I will keep it as part of my daily work.” (Ed Bak)

**Additionally, all indicated a goal of having the recital completely memorized by two weeks to one month out from the performance date.** Dr. Karen Peeler offers this advice in the choosing of repertoire: “I select music that fits my voice and personality, presents poetry that has meaning to me and I feel might for others, has audience appeal…has variety in tone, period, tempi, and setting. I love themes…either for the entire program or certainly within groups (poets, subject, composer, style).” All suggested setting specific memorization goals and memorizing as soon as possible. “I
memorize as I learn a piece. Some people will wait until they have a solid grasp on the entire piece before they begin committing it to memory, but I begin memorization from day one. This…begins to free me from the page so that I can focus on sound and physical approach to the piece right from the beginning. (Nikki Sipe, pianist) “It helps me to memorize the most challenging pieces first…I use the ‘fifteen times rule.’ To do this, you start with the first phrase of a piece and repeat it in rhythm (by either speaking or lightly singing) through fifteen times….until you’ve worked through the entire piece. It is a tedious process but one that…gets the text into my “muscle memory,” and I definitely have fewer memory slips…” (Dr. Carolyn Redman) “Concentrate on one group for the length of time it takes to get it ‘under the belt.’ That group should be eighty percent memorized before moving on.” (Eileen Davis) “I have a dry erase board above my keyboard…I have found it great to write down what…I want to focus on…during my practice session, so when I am looking forward I sing right into it! Once [a goal is] conquered, I will simply erase and write the next mini goal down.” (Erica Colopy)

Another very common theme among participants was the importance of performing your recital in small venues prior to the big day. “I sing in studio every week, so each approaching week will give me a chance to see where I am in regards to having things memorized and performance-ready.” (Natalee McReynolds) “I urge students to ‘try things out’ on school programs, in churches, for civic groups, etc., prior to the recital.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) “I think it is extremely beneficial to sing…your recital in front of people before performance…this makes me more comfortable and confident…The more you perform a piece, the more confident you will feel in the recital. I also highly
recommend practicing in the actual space you will be performing in as much as you can.” (Dr. Carolyn Redman) “In college, I took every opportunity to play in studio classes, for teachers and peers, performance classes, and in master classes. Performances pre-recital reveal areas where memory is not yet solid, where trouble spots may occur, and also help relieve nerves and build confidence in playing.” (Nikki Sipe)

**ON LEARNING A ROLE**

*Universally emphasized among the seven singers surveyed was the importance of listening to recordings, watching performances of the production on DVD or YouTube, and researching the work, the composer, and your role prior to learning the music, so that you approach it with a body of knowledge that will help you give the most accurate portrayal that you can. “Music is about connecting. Connecting is usually found with understanding…How do you understand someone or something? By observing or listening. So, as a musician studying a role, it is my job to listen. To research. Read about the composer, the era, the words, and the music…It is my job studying a role to find the connections.” (Erica Colopy)*  

*All indicated using the same systematic approach for learning and memorizing the music as they do for recitals – working in sections, setting specific goals, and memorizing as soon as possible. “I approach it like a recital, where I will work the notes and words and then work each section into my voice until I can run Act 1 by itself. Then I will do the same for the other acts. Once they are comfortable I will start to pace them all together…I will try to sing through the entire role twice in one day, take a day off, and repeat to get ready for*
rehearsals. There is so much singing required in rehearsals, particularly tech week, that I want to be sure I have the stamina to sing healthily.” (Dr. Laura Portune) **Participants also emphasized translating the text very early in the learning process.** “I will write literal translations in my score…It is also very important to translate the lines of the other singers as well so you know how to react to them on stage…really think about your character, background, motives, objectives, etc. while learning your music. You are not just singing, but storytelling.” (Dr, Carolyn Redman) “…translation and text first. Even if it’s in English, I start with the text.” (Natalee McReynolds) **Several discussed the balance between bringing ideas to rehearsal, as opposed to passive dependence upon the director, yet remaining flexible and open.** “As I learn sections, I ‘perform’ in my living room to a wall, working out gestures, facials, intent, energy for myself, so I have something to take to the director.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) “I come up with my own ideas before meeting the director and learning his/ hers.” (Dr. Laura Portune) “I try not to have too many preconceived notions about a part and let most of it become realized during the rehearsal process.” (Aaron Ramey)

**ON WORKING WITH A COACH/ACCOMPANIST**

Working with a coach remains a vital part of a singer’s preparation for performance long after he or she leaves the halls of academia. All singers surveyed indicated that at least periodic coachings remain part of their vocal regimen, particularly when preparing for a recital or operatic role. **All stressed, first and foremost, the importance of coming to your coaching prepared in every way possible, in order to get the most benefit from**
the often-costly hour. “Have specific goals that you want to accomplish before you meet with your accompanist. Be prepared with your music so you can get the most out of your session.” (Dr. Carolyn Redman) “There is no point in utilizing your time with the accompanist until you know your music.” (Eileen Davis) “I try to do as much work as I can on my own before going to a coach so that I am not wasting his/ her time and my money…I bring them an extra score, have the music well-marked for them, or page numbers of an opera ready to go so we don’t waste time looking for music. I also come with a plan of what I want to focus on during the session.” (Dr. Laura Portune) Many spoke of the differing ways in which they use their coach as a springboard for new interpretive ideas. “I see them as an extra pair of ears and a fresh perspective.” (Dr. Laura Portune) Says Dr. Kimberlee Goodman, flutist, “I have worked with…vocal coaches, and they are amazing. They give insight that my private teacher could never give. I wish I had access to my pianist for every rehearsal while preparing a recital.” “I value the coach as a sounding board for musical ideas: phrasing, dynamics, pauses, cadenzi. I like it best when we work as a team and develop the piece or character together.” (Dr. Karen Peeler) “I find my time with my coach is some of my most beneficial. In addition to correcting tuning issues, diction, and phrasing, my coach and I spend some entire lessons discussing the character (be it opera or art song).” (Natalee McReynolds) Two additional themes among those surveyed were the importance of recording your coaching sessions to get the most benefit from them, and of approaching your coaching with openness to new ideas.
ON SETTING ASIDE REPERTOIRE

In Chapter Ten, we discussed the sometimes-troublesome issue of knowing whether or not to quit practicing a particular piece that is not going well. The survey indicated that this is a common situation among musicians, that the most common reason among participants for setting repertoire aside is technical concerns, and that the setting aside is sometimes only temporary. “…if a piece is bringing out and / or reinforcing bad habits (jaw tension, bad posture, etc.) to the point that I can’t really control it anymore, I lay it aside for potential future work.” (Natalee McReynolds) “I have major concertos that I come back to every few years. These are typically pieces that are just beyond my technique level for that time in my life.” (Dr. Kimberlee Goodman) “[I quit if] I realize a piece is too technically demanding and that it is more likely that I will injure myself than get better.” (Nikki Sipe)

ON DEALING WITH PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Not surprisingly, because performance anxiety is an issue that almost every performer deals with on a regular basis, the survey participants had much to say on this topic, with three themes very much at the forefront among all of them.

Preparation: “If you know your music…and you know you know your music, performance angst is less likely to have an effect. Memorizing early is effective.” (Dr.
Karen Peeler) “If I am prepared, I have WAY less anxiety.” (Erica Colopy) “Prepare! Prepare! Prepare! Learn your music early and well.” (Dr. Carolyn Redman) “The best insurance against performance anxiety is totally thorough preparation over a considerable period of time.” (Eileen Davis)

**Performing / Simulating Performance Energy:** “Two things help me to be at ease in performance: actual run throughs (like studio class situations or…inviting a small group for a trial run) – that is, actually practicing PERFORMING, and keeping a calm mind when working, thereby developing the habit and association of mental equilibrium while playing. (Ed Bak) “I try to end every practice session with a ‘concert’ where I won’t let myself stop, where I envision people in the audience listening to me, etc.” (Dr. Laura Portune) “I like to practice in the venue I am performing in; this seems to help. I also really like to ‘practice getting nervous.’ I imagine myself backstage about to walk out and try and get my heart rate up to simulate the nerves coming about.” (Dr. Kimberlee Goodman)

**Positive mental attitude and self-talk:** “…keep a positive attitude. Negative attitudes…have no place in the performer’s mind.” (Dr. Suzanne Newcomb) “Lose yourself in the character. Don’t obsess about singing every note correctly. Do your technical work in the practice room but don’t just think about technique during your performance – be a human being. Most importantly, have fun.” (Dr. Carolyn Redman) “I always hang up the gown I am planning to wear in a prominent place so that I am
constantly walking past it. As I do, I imagine myself in front of an audience singing comfortably.” (Eileen Davis) “Any extra anxiety I have the day of performance, I like to think of as extra energy that keeps me more in the moment and alert.” (Erica Colopy) “I have a routine that I use that is very helpful for me prior to performances…It has to do with affirmations and meditation, and…a version of prayer. It is philosophical, and yet, it really works for me.” (Karen Peeler)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In retrospect, every aspiring singer must realize that talent alone will not be enough to carry him or her to the top of his or her profession. It is only talent combined with a missional and intentional approach to practice, designed against the backdrop of self-acceptance and self-knowledge, that can give the singer hope for success. You are becoming the singer you will be, one trip to the practice room at a time. Go with confidence, go with determination, and go with a plan. You will be amazed at what you can accomplish.
References


Forrest, L. Arick. “Laryngeal Anatomy.” Class lecture at The Ohio State University Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, OH, January 24, 2011.

Forrest, L. Arick. “Medication and the Voice.” Handout from class lecture at The Ohio State University Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, OH, February 21, 2011.

Forrest, L. Arick. “Laryngeal Pathology.” Class lecture at The Ohio State University Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, OH, March 7, 2011.


Appendix A: Ten Characteristics Of A Good Voice Teacher

1. Someone who has the training and experience necessary to “first do no harm,” while also challenging you vocally, within healthy parameters. You should not be feeling **consistently** hoarse or vocally fatigued following lessons or practice of techniques taught in lessons, though new techniques may at first feel challenging.

2. Someone with whom you feel comfortable on a personal level.

3. Someone who identifies and consistently works on a few things at a time with you and does NOT employ “technique of the week” teaching, in which every lesson feels as though you are starting over with some brand-new gimmick. Continuity is key to growth.

4. Someone who takes the time to warm up your voice in lessons and gives you feedback.

5. Someone who uses your lesson time wisely.

6. Someone who gives you a variety of repertoire to work on – pieces that challenge you but that you are capable of singing well with some practice.

7. Someone who respects the individuality of your personality, your voice, and your ability level, and who works with you accordingly.

8. Someone who will tell you the truth about your vocal health, ability, and progress.

9. Someone whose singing you respect.

10. Someone who is supportive of your goals and will advocate for you / encourage you to audition for appropriate opportunities.
Appendix B: Exercises And Vocalises

RELAXATION AND POSTURE

GOAL: comfort, freedom, and ease of tone production through correct physical stance

Tension Release Stretches

1. a. Raise your chin to the ceiling, take 2 deep breaths, and relax.
   b. Place your hands on the back of the head, pull your head towards your chest, take 2 deep breaths, and relax.
   c. Repeat a. and b.

2. a. In a straight posture, turn your chin to shoulder, lift your chin straight up, and stretch the neck. Take 2 deep breaths, and relax.
   b. Repeat to the other side
   c. Repeat a. and b.

3. a. In a straight posture, grab your right wrist behind your back with your left hand. Lean your ear to your left shoulder. Feel the stretch through your right neck and shoulder. Take 2 deep breaths, and relax.
   b. Repeat to the other side.
   c. Repeat a. and b.

4. a. Drop your chin to your chest and blow out all your air. Slowly rotate head as if your chin were the hands to a clock face. Breathe in for a quarter of a turn and out for a quarter of a turn. Complete the rotation twice.
b. Repeat in the opposite direction.

5. Elevate your shoulders to your ears, tense your shoulders, inhale, release the air, and relax your shoulders. **Do not hold your breath.** Repeat 5 times.

6. Roll your shoulders as if you are making big circles on the walls. Complete 5 revolutions in each direction. Breathe freely.

**Posture Checklist:**

1. **Feet** comfortably apart, 1 leading the other; weight evenly distributed and on balls of feet.
2. **Knees** slightly flexed and never locked.
3. **Hips** in line with the rest of the body – no swayback or forward pelvic tilt
4. **Abdomen** free and tall between the ribs and the hips
5. **Ribs** expanded
6. **Chest** comfortably high with a feeling of broadness – never sunken.
7. **Shoulders** relaxed - not forced backward or forward
8. **Neck** well-balanced on spine, a feeling of lift in the back.
9. **Head** tall, chin parallel to the floor, eyes ahead.

**Exercises:**

1. Pretend you are a skeleton or marionette doll, dangling from a tab at the top of your head, everything falling freely into place from that point.
2. a. Extend arms over head and stretch upward, thinking of creating height between the ribs and hips, mentally initiating the stretch at this level.

   b. Allow arms to slowly come down at sides, maintaining a sense of height in the middle of the torso. When arms are down, relax the shoulders, but keep chest in same high position.

3. Imagine being pulled up and out by a string attached to the sternum at one end, and the ceiling at the other.
4. Drop forward from the waist, letting arms dangle down in front, then slowly come up from the waist, thinking about stacking vertebrae upon vertebrae while moving upward.

**BREATHING**

**GOAL:** inhalation and breath management that will allow the singer to fulfill the interpretative demands of the music

**Exercises:**

1. Sit as though you are standing from the waist up; identify bottom of rib cage with index fingers, and breathe down to them.
2. While sitting or standing, allow air in with little “sniffs,” keeping hands around the waist, and feeling back expansion with the thumbs.
3. Lie on your back on the floor, and breathe deeply – note the rise and fall of the abdominal area, then try to achieve the same effect standing.
4. With hands around the waist or by the navel, pant quickly, like a dog. Use of /ʃ/ can make this easier to achieve.
5. “Leaky tire” exercise: take a deep breath and release the air slowly and evenly on /s/, keeping a hand on the abdomen.

**RESONANCE**

**GOAL:** achieve a clear, focused sound that will facilitate good projection of tone

1. Take a low, full breath and sigh from the middle part of your range down to the bottom on /ŋ/, then do the same from the bottom over the top and back down again, aiming the tone out all the time, so that you feel sensation in the “mask” of the face (bridge of nose / cheekbones), and keeping the jaw and tongue relaxed.

The following exercises should begin in the middle of the vocal range, move down into the low range, and move back up to the middle:
2. 5-3-1 (sol-mi-do) – on /ŋ/, sliding between the pitches
3. 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1 (do-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-re-do) – on /ŋ/
4. 5-4-3-2-1 (sol-fa-mi-re-do) – on /mlŋ/ or /bip/
5. 1-3-5-3-1 (do-mi-sol- mi-do) – on /mlŋ/ or /bip/
6. Pattern from #3 – /i/ up and /u/ down
7. 5-6, 4-5, 3-4, 2-3, 1 (sol-la, fa-so, mi-fa, re-mi, do) – alternate /u/ and /i/, 1 vowel per note

REGISTRATION

GOAL: achieve a seamless sound, without noticeable shifts in the voice, throughout the entire range

Exercises:

1. Snore gently, and/ or simulate the beginning of a yawn or sneeze to identify the sensation of palatal lift.
2. Vowel “sirens” – in a supported, high, round, resonant tone (think Julia Child’s voice!) say the following phrases:
   a. “My mother made me marry a millionaire”
   b. “Whom do you choose”
   c. “Oh no, don’t go in the snow”
   d. “My oh my, I cry and sigh”
   e. “How now, brown cow”

The following exercises should begin in the low range and move into the upper middle range and back down again:

3. 1-3-3, 2-4-4, 3-5, 4-2, 1(do-mi-mi, mi-fa-fa, me-sol, fa-re, do) – /mi hi hi/, /me he he/, /mi me mi/ – staccato on the first two groupings, then legato
4. 1-3-5-1-5-3-1 (do-mi-sol-do-sol-mi-do) – on /blup/, very short
5. Same pattern as #4 – “Where shall I go today,” very legato
6. 1-5-1 (do-sol-do) – /i u i/ or vice-versa, sliding between the pitches
7. 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1 (do-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-re-do) – on /a/, singing /i/ on the last note of the pattern
The following exercise should begin in the low or middle part of the range, move into the upper range as far as is comfortably possible, then back down again:

8. Same pattern as # 4 – /ja ha ha ha ha/ or /jo ho ho ho ho/, very staccato, concentrating on a lifted soft palate and energized breath connection

9. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-1-2-1-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 (do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do-re-do-ti-la-sol-fa-mi-re-do) – /i/ up and /a/ down, very legato

10. 1-1-1 (do-do-do) – octave slides on /i/ to /a/ for women and /i/ to /o/ for men

11. 5-1, 5-1, 5-1-5-3-1 – (sol-do, sol-do, sol-do-sol-mi-do) – /ti-e, ti-a, ti-o-ho – ho-ho/, staccato on the descent

12. 1-3-5-1-3-1-5-3-1 – (do-mi-sol-do-mi-do-sol-mi-do) – /i, e, a, o, u,/ legato and two notes per syllable

AGILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

GOAL: ensure the quick response of the breath and voice during long scales and arpeggi at quick speeds, throughout the entire range, as well as the ability to crescendo and decrescendo smoothly

Exercises:

These exercises should ascend stepwise into the upper reaches of the range – perform up to the highest possible note that can be sung well.

1. 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2, 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-1-2-1-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 (do-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-re, do-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-re, do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do-re-do-ti-la-sol-fa-mi-re-do) – /i/ up and /a/ down in the first two groupings, switching to /a/ on 5 (sol) during the ascent in the last grouping, and landing on /i/.

2. 1,1-2-3, 3-4-5, 5-6-7-1-2-3-4, 4-3-2, 2-1-7, 7-6-5-4-3-2-1 (do, do-re-mi, mi-fa-sol, sol-la-ti-do-re-mi-fa, fa-mi-re, re-do-ti, ti-la-sol-fa-mi-re-do) – /i, i-e, e-a/, then /a/ to end. Can be repeated for a greater challenge.
3. 1-3-5-1-3-1-3-1-3-1-5-3-1 (do-mi-so-do –mi-do-mi-do-mi-do-sol-mi-do) – /i/, o, a, a, o i/, 2 notes per syllable.

ESPECIALLY FOR MEN:
Vowel modification – as you ascend, round your lips and space inside your mouth into the shape of the vowel in the word “book” or “foot.” /i/ sounds will modify, through this shape, to /e/ then /ɛ/, /u/ will modify toward /Ω/ and /a/ will go through /Ω/ and then to /Λ/ space for your highest notes.

ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN:
Vowel modification – as you ascend, add a feeling of /a/, /Ω/, or /Λ/ into whatever vowel you are singing in order to help you lift the soft palate. Your highest notes should modify toward an /æ/ (as in “back”) vowel while maintaining /Λ/ space. As you descend, add a feeling of /i/ or /u/ in order make more sound on lower notes.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS:

Body Tension:
1. Try systematically tensing and releasing the body one part at a time, from your head down, and MOVE whatever feels tight as you are singing.
2. If you struggle with jaw tension, try the following:
   a. Gently massage the jaw as you sing
   b. Sing 5-3-1 (sol-mi-do) or 1-3-5-1-5-3-1 (do-mi-sol-do-sol-mi-do) on a plosive /plo/ or /bla/
   c. If your jaw consistently feels tight and /or “pops” when you open your mouth, you may have an alignment problem – see your dentist.
3. During exercises, or even while practicing portions of songs, putting /θ/ before any vowel can help release tongue tension.
4. Practice in a mirror to visually identify chronically tense areas.
5. Consider seeing a chiropractor or taking a yoga class for relief of severe tension.

**Breathing:**

1. If you find standing and breathing correctly difficult, sit and breathe first.
2. Keep your hands around your waist as you sing in order to identify where you need to expand.
3. If you have trouble moving air as you sing, try lip trills.
4. If you are letting out too much air at once in a phrase and running out at the end, practice the phrase staccato first.

**Resonance:**

If you are having difficulty finding appropriate frontal sensation in a section of your music, practice that section on /hŋ/, /m̩ŋ/, or a bright and / or closed vowel such as /i/ or /u/.

**Registration:**

1. If you find palatal lift difficult, try to identify the highest note in a phrase and then “breathe” (inhale the shape of) that vowel at the beginning of the phrase.
2. Try practicing sections of your music on vowels only in order to find the appropriate space in the mouth, and then add consonants back into that space.
3. Try breathing the space quickly, as though you are surprised.

Never give up! Everyone progresses at a different rate.
Appendix C: General Linguistic Characteristics of Italian, German, And French Which Contribute To Authenticity In Pronunciation

ITALIAN:

1. Purity of vowels, with particular attention to unstressed syllable.
2. No diphthong in pronouncing /e/, /ɛ/, and /o/
3. Appropriate “lift” or brightness to /a/ and /ɛ/.
4. Long sustained vowels in stressed syllables before a single consonant.
5. Proper linking of vowels between words.
6. Basic understanding of open and closed e and o
7. Short single consonants.
8. Long double consonants.
10. Relative lengthening of l, m, n, and r when initial in consonant clusters.

GERMAN:

1. An understanding of German word structure, which significantly affects the pronunciation of German, in particular vowel quality and length.
2. Proper pronunciation of the ich-Laut /ç/ and the ach-Laut /x/ and knowledge of when each is used.
3. Correct and consistent formation of the mixed vowels.
4. Correct and consistent formation of /e/ and /o/.
5. Proper sequencing and articulation of consecutive consonant sounds, within and between words.

FRENCH:

1. A thorough understanding of French spelling and the sounds resulting from those spellings.
2. Purity of vowels (no diphthongs).
3. Appropriate “lift” or brightness to /a/ and /ɛ/.
4. The sounds of the four nasal vowels (including not sounding the n or m) and keeping the sounds distinct from one another.
5. The proper formation of the mixed vowels.
6. Forward articulation and non-aspiration of consonants.
7. A basic understanding of liaison.

Appendix D: Pronunciation, Translation, and Interpretation
Resources For Singers

Web Pronunciation Sound Files
• "The Big List of Names" composers, titles, conductors, performers; phonetic spellings, no IPA, multi-language http://www.pronunciationguide.info/thebiglist.html

• http://www.ipasource.com

• Virginia Tech Multimedia Music Dictionary comprehensive list of terms with written phonetics, plus links http://www.music.vt.edu/musicdictionary

• IPA chart (full chart, fonts, sounds) http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/ipachart.html

• http://www.dictiondomain.com/ (language sounds, diction resource lists, tutorials)

• http://www.antimoon.com/how/pronunc-soundsipa.htm (sounds of English and IPA, with key words; Amer and Brit)

Web phonetic spellings, IPA, and/or translations

• The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Page - over 50,000 texts /over 10,000 translations http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/

• The Aria Database information on each aria, translations for many, some sound files http://www.ariadatabase.com/


• http://www.dictiondomain.com/ (diction resources, tutorials)

• Longman Pronunciation Dictionary, 3rd edition over 225,000 pronunciations in both British and American English, IPA http://www.pearsonlongman.com/dictionaries/LPD/
More web resources

• Leyerle song anthologies usually have texts, IPA, translations [http://www.leyerlepublications.com/?v=song_texts]
• "Diction Coach" series includes recitation of texts, IPA, translations [http://www.halleonard.com]
• IPA Source (not free) IPA transcriptions and literal translations of arias and art songs [http://www.ipasource.com/]
• PhoneticSoft (not free) software to create IPA on your PC for Latin, Italian, German, French texts [http://www.ipanow.com]

Books on pronouncing names and terms

• The Well-Tempered Announcer - Robert A Fradkin. Good general reference, lots of information, index
• Pronouncing Dictionary of Proper Names - John K. Bollard. Includes over 23,000 proper names, phonetics and IPA
• Pronouncing Dictionary of Musical Terms. Includes works, composers, phonetic readings, no IPA
• Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation (both American and British)
• Longman Pronunciation Dictionary - J.C. Wells. IPA for both American and British [http://www.pearsonlongman.com/dictionaries/LPD/]
• Singing Early Music - T.J. McGee, A.G. Rigg, D.N. Klausner. IPA for Late Middle Ages and Renaissance song texts
• The Goliard Poets - George F. Whicher. Medieval Latin songs with translations

Books with Phonetic readings and/or IPA, and translations by language

Multiple Languages

• The Ring of Words: an Anthology of Song Texts - Philip Lieson Miller
• Exploring Art Song Lyrics - Jonathan Retzlaff and Cheri Montgomery
• Word-by-Word Translations of Songs and Arias, part 1, German and French - Berton Coffin and Pierre Delattre
• Word-by-Word Translations of Songs and Arias, part 2, Italian - Arthur Schoep and Daniel Harris

Opera Libretti (IPA and translations)

• French Opera Libretti (3 volumes) - Nico Castel
• German Miscellaneous Opera Libretti - Nico Castel
• Italian Belcanto Opera Libretti - Nico Castel
• Italian Verismo Opera Libretti - Nico Castel
• Carmen: A Performance Guide - M. Dibbern
• Handel Opera Libretti - Nico Castel
• The Janacek Opera Libretti - Timothy Cheek
• The Complete Puccini Libretti - Nico Castel
• Four Strauss Opera Libretti - Nico Castel

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• The Complete Verdi Libretti - Nico Castel
• Three Wagner Opera Libretti - Nico Castel
• [Wagner] Der Ring des Nibelungen - Nico Castel

**Czech**
• Singing in Czech: A Guide to Czech Lyric Diction and Vocal Repertoire - Timothy Cheek

**French**
• The Interpretation of French Song - Pierre Bernac
• Masters of the French Art Song: Translations of the complete Songs of Chausson, Debussy, Duparc, Fauré & Ravel - Timothy Le Van

**German**
• Ten Cycles of Lieder (Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, Schubert, Schumann) - Marie-Therese Paquin
• The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder - D. Fischer-Dieskau
• German Lieder - P.L. Miller, ed.
• Lieder Line by Line: and Word for Word - Lois Phillips
• The Penguin Book of Lieder - S. Prawer

**Italian**
• Italian Song Texts from the 17th through the 20th Centuries - Martha Gerhart
• Arie Antiche - Dorothy Richardson and Tina Ruta

**Russian**
• Russian Songs & Arias: Phonetic Readings, Word-by-Word Translations, and a Concise Guide to Russian Diction - Jean Piatak and Regina Avrashov

**Spanish**
• The Singer's Anthology of 20th Century Spanish Songs / Joseph Miquel Sobrer & Edmon Colomer
• The Spanish Song Companion - Jaqueline Cockburn & Richard Stokes

**Books with Phonetic readings and/or IPA, and translations by composer**

**Bizet**
• Carmen: A Performance Guide - M. Dibbern

**Brahms**
• Texts of the vocal Works of Johannes Brahms / Henry S. Drinker
• Brahms's Vocal Duets and Quartets with piano - Lucien Stark
• A Guide to the Solo Songs of Johannes Brahms - Lucien Stark
• Brahms' Complete Song Texts - Beaumont Glass
• Phonetic Readings of Brahms Lieder - Candace A. Magner
Debussy
- The Singer's Debussy - Marie-Claire Rohinsky
- The Poetic Debussy - M. Cobb; transl. R. Miller

Monteverdi
- Monteverdi Songs & Madrigals - Denis Stevens

Moussorgsky
- English Texts for the Songs of Modeste Moussorgsky - Henry S. Drinker

Rachmaninoff
- Rachmaninov's Complete Song Texts - Laurence Richter
- The Singer's Rachmaninoff - Natalia Challis

Rodrigo
- A Singer's Guide to the Songs of Joaquin Rodrigo - Suzanne Rhodes Draayer

Schubert
- The Schubert Song Companion - John Reed
- Texts of the Solo Songs of Franz Schubert in English Translation - Henry S. Drinker
- Schubert: the Complete Song Texts - Richard Wigmore
- Schubert's Complete Song Texts - Beaumont Glass
- Schubert and Schumann: Songs and Translations - Robert R. Garran

Schumann
- The Singer's Schumann - Thilo Reinhard 1989
- Schubert and Schumann: Songs and Translations - Robert R. Garran

Tchaikovsky
- Tchaikovsky's Complete Song Texts - L.R. Richter
- Tchaikovsky's Complete Songs: A Companion with Texts and Translations - R.D. Sylvester

Wolf
- Hugo Wolf's Complete Song Texts - Beaumont Glass
- Texts of the Solo Songs of Hugo Wolf - Henry S. Drinker

Diction manuals by language

Multiple languages by author last name
- A Handbook of Diction for Singers: Italian, German, French - David Adams
- The Singer's Manual of German and French Diction - Richard G. Cox
- Diction: Italian, Latin, French, German - John Moriarty

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• The Singer's Guide to Languages - Marcie Stapp (includes verb charts and translation hints)
• International Phonetic Alphabet for Singers: A Manual for English and Foreign Language Diction - Joan Wall
• Diction for Singers: A Concise Reference for English, Italian, Latin, German, French, and Spanish - Joan Wall

Czech
• Singing in Czech - Timothy Cheek

English
• Singing in English: A Manual of English Diction for Singers and Choral Directors - Richard Cox
• American Diction for Singers - Geoffrey G. Forward
• Singing and Communicating in English: A Singer's Guide to English Diction - Kathryn LaBouff

French
• French Lyric Diction - Thomas M. Donnan
• Singing in French - Thomas Grubb
• Dictionnaire de la Pronunciation Française - Léon Warnant (No definitions, just IPA for words; includes a section in the back with IPA for names of people and places)

German
• Gateway to German Diction - Paton
• German for Singers - William Odom

Italian
• Singers' Italian – Evelina Colorni

Latin

Russian
• Russian Songs & Arias: Phonetic Readings, Word-by-Word Translations, and a Concise Guide to Russian Diction - Jean Piatak and Regina Avrashov

Spanish
• A Singer's Manual of Spanish Lyric Diction - Nico Castel
Books on interpretation of songs and arias

General
• Sensibility and English Song - Stephen Banfield
• Recent American Art Song - Keith E. Clifton
• A Performer's Guide to Baroque Music - Robert Donington
• American Art Song and American Poetry (3 vol) - Ruth C. Friedberg
• Bringing Opera to Life - Boris Goldovsky
• Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vocal Style and Technique - Sally Sanford
• A History of Song - ed. Denis Stevens
• Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias - Martial Singher
• A French Song Companion - Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes

Composers (by composer last name)
• The Poetic Debussy (song texts and letters)
• On the Interpretation of the Melodies of Claude Debussy - Jane Bathori
• Nineteenth-Century French Song: Fauré, Chausson, Duparc, and Debussy - Barbara Meister
• Interpreting the Songs of Gabriel Fauré - Robert Gartside
• A Grieg Song Anthology – Ellingboe & Leyerle
• Interpreting the Songs of Jacques Leguerney - Dibbern et al.
• Francis Poulenc: The Man and His Songs - Pierre Bernac
• The Unknown Puccini: A Historical Perspective on the Songs - Michael Kaye
• Interpreting the Songs of Maurice Ravel - Robert Gartside
• A Singer's Guide to the Songs of Joaquin Rodrigo - Suzanne Draayer
• Schubert: A Biographical Study of His Songs - Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau
• A Companion to the Schwanengesang - Martin Chusid
• The Songs of Robert Schumann - Eric Sams 1993
Appendix E: Impact Of Medications On The Voice

MEDICATIONS WHICH HAVE A DRYING EFFECT ON THE VOICE

Antihistamines/ Decongestants

Common (Over the Counter: non-prescription) Antihistamines/ Decongestants:

Azatadine (Trinaline)
Brompheniramine (Dimetane/ Dimetap)
*Cetirizine (Zyrtec) – good choice for singers if loratadine is not strong enough, though sedating
Chlorpheniramines (ChlorTrimeton)
Clemastine (Tavist)
Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
*Fexofenadine (Allegra) – good choice for singers if loratadine is not strong enough
*Loratadine (Claritin) – has fewest side effects; best choice in category for singers
Norepinephrine (Levophed)
Phenylephrine (Rynatan)
Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed, Actifed)
Singers should completely avoid any “D” formulas (such as Allegra D or Zyrtec D) – extremely drying and can also cause insomnia, hypertension, and rapid heart rates

**Cough suppressants**

**Common OTC and prescription cough suppressants:**

- Dextromethorphan (Robitussin DM)
- Benzonatate (tessalon Perles)
- Codeine (Tussi-Organidine)
- Hydrocodone (Hycotuss)
- Promethazine (Phenergan)

**Anxiety / Anti-Depressant / Mood Stabilizers** – These should be used with caution and only after consulting with a physician / as necessary for functioning at the minimum effective dosage, and may cause the additional vocal side effects listed

**Commonly Prescription Anti-Depressants:**

- Bipropion (Wellbutrin)
- Citalopram (Celexa) – coughing, reflux, asthma, laryngitis, and bronchospasms
- Fluoxetine (Prozac) – sore throat
- Paroxetine (Paxil) – lump in the throat
- Sertaline (Zoloft) – sore throat

**Common Prescription Anti-Anxiety Medications:**

- Alprazolam (Xanax) – alterations in vocal pitch, volume, and timbre
Diazepam (Valium)
Lorazepam (Ativan)
Triazolam (Halcion)

Vitamins, especially Vitamin C

Anti-Diarrheals

Common OTC Anti-Diarrheals:
Diaphenoxylate and Atrophine (Lomotil)
Loperamide (Immodium)

MEDICATIONS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO HOARSENESS

Asthma Medications

“...the medications used to treat asthma can adversely affect the voice. Inhalers can result in vocal cord irritation, as they need to pass through the cords to reach the lungs. The more frequent the inhalers are needed the more likely they are to produce irritation...Singers with asthma should consider working with an asthma specialist (pulmonologist or allergist) with a goal of optimizing control with the lowest dose and frequency of inhalers. The addition of a leukotriene receptor antagonist, such as montelukast (Singulair), that is delivered in pill form, can control mild asthma or decrease the frequency and dose of inhaler use. Asthma and allergies...often occur together. Controlling the allergies will improve control of the asthma.”

Hormone Therapy

Birth control pills
Danazol (Donocrine) – used to treat fibrocystic breast disease and endometriosis

Blood Pressure Medications

Captopril (Capoten)
Enalapril (Vasotec)
Lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril)
Ramparil (Altace)

MEDICATIONS WHICH CAN CONTRIBUTE TO VOCAL HEMORRHAGE

(Blood thinners)

NSAIDS (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs)

Common OTC NSAIDS:

Acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin)
Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil)
Naproxen (Aleve)

Common prescription NSAIDS:

Nabumetone (Relafen)
Oxaprozin (Daypro)
Piroxicam (Feldene)

INSTEAD OF A FULL ADULT DOSE OF Benadryl / Dimetapp / Sudafed, or Other Decongestant:

Take a pediatric dose to start, and increase only as necessary

Use saline treatments, such as a Neti-pot
Use a nasal spray or prescription nasal steroid spray, as needed, for up to 5 days

**Common OTC Nasal Sprays:**

- Oxymetasolam (Afrin)
- Neosynephrine

**Common Prescription Steroid Nasal Sprays:**

- Budesonide (Rhinocort)
- Fluticasone (Flonase, Veramyst)
- Mometasone (Nasonex)
- Triamcinolone (Nasacort)

**INSTEAD OF A COUGH SUPPRESSANT ALONE:**

- Use Mucinex DM, which contains both a cough suppressant (dextromethorphan) and a lubricant (Guafenesin)

**INSTEAD OF A NSAID:**

- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol)

As with any medication, in all of the above cases, the singer and his or her doctor must determine whether or not the benefits of a particular drug outweigh its risks at any given time. As a general rule, however, “a singer should not use any medication unless absolutely necessary.”

This material is used with permission from L. Arick Forrest, M.D., “Medication and the Voice” (Handout from class lecture at The Eye and Ear Institute, Columbus, Ohio, February 21, 2011), excerpts.
Appendix F: Sample Performance Evaluation Tools

SELF-DIRECTED PERFORMANCE EVALUATION:

1. Note three or more aspects of your performance that went well.
2. Note three or more things that you’d like to improve before your next performance.
3. Determine the reasons for your successes.
4. Specify action plans to achieve improvements.

TRUE/ FALSE EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT:

Mark each statement as “TRUE” or “FALSE”:

1. I’m building my understanding of how performance stress affects me before, during and after a concert.
2. I feel less threatened by performance stress.
3. I’m more aware of the personal, task-related, and situational causes of performance anxiety in general and with me in particular.
4. When I have trouble on stage, I always know how to practice to bring about improvements in my next performance.
5. Of the five facets of preparation (artistic, technical, physical, mental / emotional, organizational), I know the areas in which I’m most capable and those in which I need to make more progress.
6. In the areas of preparation in which I’m weakest, I have plans for how to advance.
7. On the day of a concert, I know how to prepare myself and my things to minimize stress.
8. Upon arrival at a venue, I’m capable of managing the backstage environment, supervising stage setup, and working with any staff.
9. When I’m restless backstage, I use specific techniques to ease my discomfort and awaken my creativity.
10. I feel secure walking on stage, bowing, and carrying out all of the other aspects of stage deportment.
11. I can project a stage presence that contributes to an audience’s enjoyment of my performance.
12. I’m able to start and end pieces with consistent control.
13. During a performance, I know how to employ tactics – such as deep breathing, mental focus, and positive self-talk – that lesson the unwanted effects of nerves.
14. Even if I’m nervous, when performing accessible material, I can still be sufficiently accurate and expressive.
15. Performing often stimulates me in constructive ways and helps me be more creative.
16. When performing, I’m committed to giving my listeners the best possible experience; I don’t give in to self-conscious worries.
17. I can speak to an audience in a personable way.
18. I can handle on-stage errors to curtail their musical impact.
19. While performing, I let errors go and seldom become distressed.
20. After a concert, I’m able to accept my performance and not berate myself for slip-ups.
21. Following a performance, I’m supportive of my colleagues and courteous to my listeners.
22. I deliberately evaluate my performances.
23. I regularly practice performance skills by doing private run-throughs and performing for peers.
24. I know where to find expert help for performance problems that I can’t solve on my own.
25. I’m confident that my performance skills are improving.

Appendix G: General Resources for Singers

WEBSITES

Aria-Database: translations, aria information, resources

www.aria-database.com

Chicago Center for Professional Voice: Guide to Voice Rehabilitation

www.singershealth.com

International Music Score Library Project / Petrucci Music Library (IMSLP): online journal, links to scores, composers, and recordings

www.imslp.org

The Savvy Musician: links to resources

www.savvymusician.com

MAGAZINES

Classical Singer: www.classicalsinger.com

Opera: news, interviews, reviews worldwide; can subscribe or read online

www.opera.co.uk

Opera America: www.operaamerica.org

Opera News: reviews, articles, interviews

www.operanews.com

Opera Today: news, reviews, commentary worldwide
BOOKS

_A Soprano on Her Head_, Eloise Ristad

_Art of the Song Recital, The_, Shirlee Emmons and Stanley Sonntag

_Basics of Pedagogy_, Clifton Ware

_Functional Unity of the Singing Voice, The_, Barbara M. Doscher

_Great Singers on Great Singing_, Jerome Hines

_Guide to Operatic Roles and Arias_, Richard Boldrey

_How to Learn the Alexander Technique_, Barbara and William Conable

_Inner Game of Tennis, The_, W. Timothy Gallwey

_Keep Your Voice Healthy_, Freidrich S. Brodnitz

_On the Art of Singing_, Richard Miller

_Performer’s Voice, The_, Michael S. Benninger and Thomas Murry

_Power Performance for Singers_, Shirlee Emmons and Alma Thomas

_Savvy Musician, The_, David Cutler

_Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature_, Carol Kimball

_Structure of Singing, The_, Richard Miller

_Vocal Wisdom_, Giovanni Battista Lamperti

_Your Voice: An Inside View_, Scott McCoy