


AN OCCASIONAL PAPER

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THE CARY M. MAGUIRE CENTER  
FOR ETHICS & PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY  
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY  
DALLAS, TEXAS

BOOK 4



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sing.” Most of us can sing, or dance, or swim, or bike, or run, or play basketball, a little bit and with relative ease. Of course, being able to do a thing a little bit doesn’t mean one has the talent that could be developed to a professional level. The conviction that we have talent, combined with our knack for singing, is what motivates some of us to make singing our life’s work.

In my experience, most young artists know whether or not their talent, discipline, and interest, will sustain a career by the end of their undergraduate studies. At that stage, my colleagues and I agree that there must be clearly visible passion—a “fire in the belly”—and a complete conviction that the aspiring singer will not be fulfilled or happy doing anything else. As a teacher, I respect my student’s choice. The singer may want to begin a professional career or simply join those who are



be easier and perhaps more desirable to teach students who have had training, experience, and exposure to the arts. Yet, as my former colleague, mentor, and friend Bruce Foote frequently said, "Why do the students need us if they have to come here with everything?" If we entertain the notion that piano skills or prior lessons in piano is a prerequisite for undergraduate or graduate study in voice, we might very well eliminate great artists like our former colleague, Thomas Hayward, who sang sixteen seasons at the Metropolitan Opera without these skills.

The philosophy about music literacy, as a prerequisite for vocal training, might have prevented many of the vocal legends of our time from their singing careers. It has been written and reported by many that Luciano Pavarotti, for example, had difficulty reading music. It seems that he was at the very least a slow sight-reader. What does this skill of music reading say about Pavarotti (or anyone) as a singer?

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in performance and built upon his magnanimous ability to connect with the audience. After singing Blitch in the opera Susannah by Carlisle Floyd, Dr. Dulcamara in Donizetti's L'elisir

address their voice types and technical issues. They are instructed to design their practice to follow the structure and format of their lessons. Expectations are outlined for each lesson. Students are given instructions about how to work on specific problem areas of the voice, how to avoid undesirable resonance and timbre, and how to react to problems with intonation or pain and discomfort in singing. They are given warning signs for unhealthy production and guidelines for the duration of practice. By the end of the first month of lessons, all singers have begun to develop a workable foundation for further development. These are the “not so glamorous” aspects of performance study. In order for this plan to have effect, it is necessary for singers to be teachable. They should be willing to try anything, including changing old habits that might bring comfort on stage.

We, as teachers, must remember that every person, and therefore every voice, is different in size, color, character, etc. Our ethical challenge is to help students discover their own voices through study and self-exploration. We should note that the development of talent is not the job of the voice teacher alone. A team including the vocal coach, the movement director, the opera director, the dance teacher, linguists, and a host of other players also contributes to the process. However, in my view, the voice teacher is the most important person in the professional life of a singer.

Many singers do very well in study and in performance, but have difficulty in auditions and competitions. The study process helps prepare the artist for performance, but there really is no substitute for the actual experience of competition. The first thing singers and all competitive performers learn is that they must have thick skin. They need to apply for auditions and enter competitions as long as they stay in the field. They must develop the capacity to hear, weigh, and sometimes, embrace criticism. Dealing with daily rejection and criticism with acceptance is a huge part of the profession. A singular focus on one’s career goals and perseverance are also crucial. When I say, “put on your blinders,” to my students, they know that it means they must be selfish enough to prioritize their careers and thus keep criticisms

in perspective.

My first competition experience occurred in my first year of university teaching. Although I excelled in performance in school and frequently performed in a variety of concerts, recitals, and operas with principal roles, I was focused on becoming a teacher. At that time, there was a huge divide between the kinds of opportunities offered to students majoring in performance and those in education. Since I majored in education and not performance, my teachers never encouraged me to enter competitions. Perhaps it never occurred to them that I might be interested and I had no idea that those opportunities existed.

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text, and perhaps, building up the ability to sing through repertory from memory. Ideally, every lesson bears results. For competitions, each student and I co-establish specific objectives and results for every event. It is my challenge to develop a pedagogical plan that addresses the individual needs of each of my students. All performing artists have to learn to perform their best in front of judges. For some singers, the mere act of getting up and singing without fear through the end is already an accomplishment. No matter what, the primary objective is to sing beautifully. Winning competitions, auditions and employment are derivative outcomes.

Many of my former students have discovered their voices in dual careers. Brad Raymond, who received a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Music in 2005 from SMU with majors in Business and Music, received a Masters of Music from Indiana University in 2007. After working with a local accounting firm for a year, he returned to Indiana to begin doctoral studies in voice performance and pedagogy. Robert King, who received a B.M. from SMU in 1988, was International Director Sales for Prada until 2005, is now in the same position with Loro Piana. Joseph Salah, who earned a B.M. and B.S. in Business, worked as a summer associate with the Paris Opera and in marketing for Yves Saint Laurent. Joey lives in Paris and he has a career in painting and set designs. Donna Doorenboos received a M.M. in vocal performance, and is now a medical doctor. Anna Litvino and John Fichtel received a M.M. in voice and are now attorneys; both have continued singing as a hobby. John works in arts administration as the manager of the Connecticut Opera. Other former students are high school and college administrators, and/or teachers. There are performers singing throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and South America who sang last season in the roles of Carmen at New York City Opera, Daughter of the Regiment at Houston Opera, and in San Francisco, Lima, Peru, and a host of other companies throughout the world.

In 1989, I established the Foote Scholarship Award in memory of my former teacher, mentor and friend, Bruce R. Foote. Since that year, with the help of the Bruce R. Foote

Memorial Scholarship Foundation<sup>5</sup>, need-based financial assistance has been given to singers of every ethnicity from all over the world. Our primary objective is to assist singers who, because of race, ethnicity, gender, and national origin, have been denied opportunities for careers in classical singing. The Foote Foundation does this work through a number of initiatives.

The Schollmaier Foundation Awards recognize outstanding South African singers. The David M. Crowley Award is presented to students who excel in opera and give service to others. The Rosemary Hagggar Vaughan Summer Scholars is a special award for summer study given annually to students who assist in the fund-raising efforts of the Foote Foundation.

I hold dear the teachings of my parents and grandparents that we are called to serve. Through my teaching, I seek to instill this belief in my students. I must say, not every student is convinced of it immediately. One of my most beloved and successful students once was reluctant to support the Foote Foundation. She said she would not give financial support to the Foundation, because its main goal is to support students with backgrounds that have been historically under-represented in the advanced pursuit of classical vocal study. She saw it as discrimination, but ultimately made a contribution. She also once said, "I don't think I will ever teach!" She went on a business trip with her fiancée to Congo, discovered two male voices with enormous potential, and began teaching these two young men during her stay. After returning to her home in Belgium, she was haunted by the memory of those "diamonds in the rough." She knew that their talents might remain forever undeveloped, so she brought them to Belgium, and provided housing, private study, and financial assistance. She established a foundation to assist them. This same former student of mine is the internationally acclaimed soprano, Laura Claycomb. Laura has brought singers to Europe, and provided stipends and transportation for them to study languages and opera. Laura established a website<sup>6</sup> that helps young singers pursue their opera careers, and it is used by teachers and young

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.footefoundation.org>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.lauraclaycomb.com/yac/advice.htm>

artists throughout the world. Laura is a native Texan from Dallas. She studied with me in the late 1980s, and afterwards became a talented performing artist and a very talented teacher.

Few can predict who or what will inspire our next generation of teachers. As teachers, we are proud and excited when we witness our students develop their talents and artistry.

The song “Wouldn’t it be lovely” from the musical and movie, *My Fair Lady*, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, it would be lovely if we could reach each and every singer who comes our way and make diamonds of them all. The reality is that we cannot and we will not. Some are simply meant to become different sorts of gems. As a professional teacher, I believe that these different gems deserve attention, too, and it is important to me that I continually study and maintain open dialogue with colleagues who recognize and appreciate the significance of the profession of teaching. Teaching means that we must remain open to our students as individuals. Our students come to us with what they have, and it is our challenge to help them discover how best to develop their talents to achieve their artistic potential. Hopefully, the process of methodical teaching and careful mentoring will assist us in helping our students to find their voices.

In order to continue my own professional development, I believe it is necessary for me to converse with colleagues who have a passion for teaching. Engaging in conversations about challenges in talent development and nurturing uniqueness in students is of utmost importance to me. I have been fortunate to have dialogue with colleagues here at SMU and in various parts of the world, whose global perspective has been invigorating and educational to me.

My abilities as a teacher and developer of talent have been further honed through my involvement in the Internship Program sponsored by the National Association of Teachers of Singers (NATS).<sup>7</sup> Experienced and knowledgeable NATS-member teachers are paired with beginning NATS teachers and their students for two weeks. The NATS National President and Regional Director serve as hosts of the Internship

Program. They work to create a workshop setting within a

<sup>7</sup> The official website of the NATS intern program is <http://www.nats.org/nats-intern-program.html>.

of my family members, I would not be where I am today. I am grateful to my parents for convincing me at an early age that I could decide my profession, my future, and believe in its fruition. I was convinced; I *deserved* success, if I worked hard. Therefore, I could hope. Today, I am reminded that, regardless of the opinions of others, there is no faith, without hope, and no joy without trials. As we discover our personal talents in differing ways throughout our lives, we see that the more we discover, learn, and know about ourselves, the clearer our personal picture becomes. As we grow, the picture comes closer, and yet we realize there is so much more to discover with greater knowledge and more experience.

With pitch, pronunciation, enunciation, timbre, phrasing, and dynamics, we learn to shape our thoughts with our voice. Each voice is a unique instrument in the world. Students start out learning how to listen and to truly hear and appreciate the unique sounds of their own voices. When they accomplish that, I help them use their ears, eyes, minds, bodies, and hearts to express their own joy in singing – to bring joy to others. “If music be the food of love, sing on...”

This essay originated in a lecture presented in April 2008, for the Cary M. Maguire Center for Ethics & Public Responsibility. This lecture/recital was presented with the assistance of four of my students whose talent, life, education, and performance experiences were vivid visual and aural examples of the topic of talent development. I thank my SMU colleagues, Tara Emerson and Brian Bentley, who accompanied the singers on that occasion. I am deeply indebted to all of the following students and colleagues for their contribution to this presentation. It has been my great privilege to work with these singers as they developed their voices and their artistry, while studying at Southern Methodist University.

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Accompanists  
Tara Emerson, SMU Staff Accompanist  
Brian Bentley, SMU Staff Accompanist

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- VOLUME 3 "Journalism as a High Profession in Spite of Itself"
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