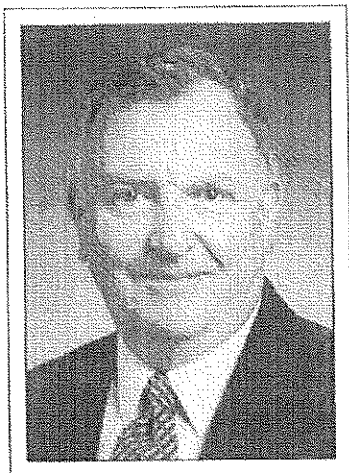


## NATS Visits AATS



Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

The *Journal of Singing* continues a serial reproduction of selected pronouncements issued by the American Academy of Teachers of Singing. For a brief history of the organization and its unique relationship to NATS, the reader is referred to the *Journal of Singing* 58, no. 1 (Sept/Oct 2001). Since 1922, the year of its founding, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing has been actively writing and disseminating papers on all subjects pertaining to the teaching of singing. Inevitable changes in the profession itself and in musical life in general have since demanded that the Statements from the Academy be brought up to date.

This Statement on musicianship and the singer, changed to its present form in 1997, was originally published in 1931, then first revised in 1974. It is presented here without comment or emendation. The guidelines do not necessarily reflect the philosophy of NATS, nor does the appearance of the Statement in the *Journal of Singing* imply NATS en-

dorsement. Readers are invited to visit the AATS web site [[www.voiceteachersacademy.org](http://www.voiceteachersacademy.org)].



### Musicianship and the Singer

The Academy is keenly aware that singers with excellent voices frequently fail to make satisfactory progress in their professional careers because of inadequate musicianship. Musicianship may be defined as "the mastery of music." It calls for the ability to read music and to realize the intent of that music. The performer must possess the skills to meet the technical and interpretative demands of the composition. The singer should seek to develop these at as early an age as possible. Programs of music study that have both breadth and depth have become an accepted part of the curriculum in some secondary schools, and in colleges, universities, and conservatories. Such training should be universally adopted. However, these courses should include the ability to **perform** the musical phrase as well as to recognize it on paper.

Singers have always faced a highly competitive market, and although there are many more opportunities now—more competitions and many more opera companies—there are many more singers in the field vying for these expanded oppor-

tunities. The young aspirant must not only be endowed with a beautiful voice that is well trained, as well as linguistic ability of a high order, but he or she must also be able to compete on a high musical and interpretive level. Music theater, too, has become more musically sophisticated and requires either a fine musical background or a full-time coach.

Today, the singer who is engaged to appear with orchestras will find that, due to the tremendous expense involved, he or she is allowed a relatively short rehearsal time. A good musician will not waste the valuable time of a conductor and orchestra; a poor one will be too expensive, therefore unacceptable. In opera, at the first rehearsal (usually musical without staging) a singer must know the part from memory and must sing it with musical understanding. Perhaps the singer can achieve this by working the role with a good coach, but the expense involved in coaching a role from the beginning of the learning process can cost hundreds, even several thousand dollars. This is prohibitive for most singers, and, one would think, humiliating for anyone calling him- or herself a musician. A coach should be used, of course, but only after a role is memorized. Musicianship is essential, and it helps to be a quick study.

Television and radio commercials afford an exceedingly lucrative field for a limited number of singers. The ability to read music speedily and accurately is a prime requisite for this specialized area of the profession.

One cannot be expected to reach perfection before attempting profes-

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sional activity, but the fact remains that a regrettable number of promising singers have met failure and disappointment by plunging ahead without adequate musical and technical preparation. A singing career should not be launched without this preparation. Teachers and managers have the responsibility to counsel patience and diligence.

In earlier times it was said that the three essential ingredients for a singer were "voice, voice, and more voice." Today, in addition to voice, good musicianship is imperative.

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*Tenor Sjoerdsma is an active recitalist in the Midwest, and he has appeared with a number of important orchestras, opera companies, and oratorio societies. He is also a veteran of fourteen European concert tours, having sung in Berlin, Hannover, Hamburg, Augsburg, Budapest (Hungary), and a number of other cities in Germany, Sweden, France, and Austria. As a writer, Sjoerdsma has authored some TNB articles, a book on the chamber music of Franz Christoph Neubauer, an article, "Neubauer" for the new Grove's, and he has managed the "Bookshelf" column for TNB/TNJ/JOS from 1972 to 2001, at which point he became Editor of the Journal of Singing.*

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- A Series of Four Electromyographic Studies*, William Vennard, Minora Hirano, John Ohala, and Bjorn Fritzell, 1971, 31 pp. **\$5.00**  
Originally published in *The NATS Bulletin*, 1970-71. Electromyographic research of the authors concerning laryngeal synergy in singing chest, head, and falsetto; varieties of voice production; and the extrinsic laryngeal muscles.
- English Singing Translations of Foreign Language Art Songs*, Arthur Schoep, James P. Dunn, Gean Greenwell, and Frederic Kirchberger, 1976, 44 pp. **\$6.00**  
The purpose of the collection is to promote the use of foreign language songs in English. Singable translations of 136 standard French, Italian, and German songs. No arias. Photocopied from original typewritten text.
- Foundations of the Singer's Art*, Victor Fields, reprinted 1984, 118 pp. **\$14.00**  
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- History of the National Association of Teachers of Singing*, Harvey Ringel, 1990, 360 pp. **\$33.00**  
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- In Memoriam: William D. Vennard, 1909-1971, Selected Articles From the Writings of William Vennard*, edited by Robert T. Gurnee, 34 pp. **\$9.00**
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