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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, changed to its present form in 1999, was originally prepared in 1967.

## THE COLLEGE STUDENT AND THE SINGING OF GRAND OPERA AND RECITAL

Performances of opera on the college level are spreading widely and rapidly, and Senior Song Recitals are often required for graduation. The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes, therefore, that a statement on these subjects is needed to guide the efforts of young singers.

### I

#### Opera

Programs of opera production in colleges and conservatories have many positive values. They offer the student a chance to acquire repertoire, develop ensemble singing skills, practice diction and languages, learn acting, sing with an orchestra, and perform before an audience. These performances also have considerable value in introducing audiences to opera and helping to develop public interest in this art form.

On the negative side, however, adequate performance of opera is an exceedingly complex undertaking, demanding a voice trained to a high degree of proficiency, unusual stamina, musicianship, and acting ability. An opera singer must be able to convey the emotions of a role to the audience with clarity and sincerity, as well as produce beautiful sounds and create a brilliant picture. It would be extraordinary if such gifts were to mature in a young singer, particularly since full vocal development is rarely attained before the twenty-fifth year. Technical uncertainty and vocal immaturity can make performance of an opera a source of worry, tension and frustration instead of a fulfilling and joyful experience. Unfortunately, these heavy demands, often coupled with the need to maintain an academic schedule, may result in severe damage to potentially fine young voices.

The Academy believes, therefore, that the undergraduate student should be led progressively to the threshold of actual professional performance. Opera that demands an exceptional amount of vocal power and physical stamina should not be attempted on the college level. Rather, performances should be limited to lighter operas and less vocally demanding repertoire with appropriate rest between performances and rehearsals. Young singers face an added difficulty of formidable proportions when the opera is sung in a foreign language. For that reason, opera in English is strongly recommended. Also, since students differ in talent and technique, it is essential that there be communication and coordination between members of the vocal faculty and the opera department.

## II

### Recital

Customarily, the primary requirement for a Bachelor of Music Degree in our American colleges and conservatories is the performance of a Senior Recital. According to the departmental requirements, the program of this recital should include a solo cantata or an oratorio aria, at least one operatic aria in its original language; three groups of songs from the German, French and Italian repertoires, and a fourth group of contemporary songs in English or a language in which the student is fluent.

Singing a recital is indeed complex. It demands certain vocal mastery, musical knowledge, a singing command of several languages, and a full understanding of the texts. Added to this, there must be the ability to create a different mood for each song and to experience intense emotion while maintaining physical poise. In reference to languages, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that study should be more in depth and concentration and less in quantity and dispersion. It would seem wiser for a student to become more proficient in one foreign language than to confuse him with several.

Joint recitals, in which two students alternate singing groups of songs are to be recommended. This allows the student to regain composure while the other student performs and then reappear with renewed authority and a better chance of demonstrating talent and development. Also, the opportunity to perform chamber music--whether duets or solo works with instruments-- should not be overlooked. It is imperative that there be close teacher involvement in the areas of proper rehearsal techniques, repertoire selection and time management skills while at the same time encouraging students to explore the repertoire and to gain artistic and intellectual independence.

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing recommends that these few sound principles be followed in the formative stages of a student's training not only in our colleges and conservatories but in continued graduate study and the private studio as well.