



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF TEACHERS OF SINGING

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Member

National Music Council

Chair

Robert C. White, Jr.
600 West 116th St.
New York, NY 10027-7042

Vice Chair

Jean Westerman Gregg
11 Old Quarry Road
Woodbridge, CT 06525-1005

Secretary

Chloe Owen
41 West 86th St
New York, NY 10024-3609

Treasurer

Jan Eric Douglas
777 West End Ave.
New York, NY 10025-5551

Publications Officer

Robert Gartside
20 Loring Road
Lexington, MA 02421-6945

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Ethics Revisited

A Presentation for the 2001 Convention
Music Teachers National Association
Washington, D.C., March 26, 2001

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I. Ethical Behavior within the Voice Teaching Profession Itself

A. Ethical Considerations Regarding the Proper Preparation for the Teacher
of Singing

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believe that:

1. Any person declaring him/herself a voice teacher bears an ethical responsibility to possess the finest musical and pedagogical qualifications.

2. The voice teaching profession bears an ethical responsibility to provide a set of guidelines to examine the credentials of persons who declare themselves to be voice teachers. Such guidelines should include: specific knowledge of the voice as a physical and acoustic instrument (including complete knowledge of anatomy -- how it works and how it cannot work), significant training in musicianship, knowledge of vocal literature, and appropriate performance experience.

3. Institutions of higher learning involved in the teacher training process bear an ethical responsibility to provide proper courses and supervised hands-on experience for students preparing to be teachers of voice.

4. It is unethical in the preparation of a teacher of singing to promote one particular pedagogical system or methodology to the exclusion of all others, nor should the pedagogy draw exclusively from either historical or current sources.

B. Ethical Behavior Between Teacher and Student

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that:

1. It is ethical for teachers during the initial audition to be candid and forthcoming about what needs to be done to help students achieve better vocal skills; to draw out students to determine their own perception of improvement needs; to explain clearly the methods by which they intend to correct student deficiencies; to outline a plan for study and to answer completely student questions about procedures.

2. It is unethical for teachers to criticize work done with students' former teachers, to insist that their own method is the "only" way to make good progress in vocal skills; to promise financial success or other extravagant hopes.

3. It is ethical with respect to fees that teachers consider student resources and the necessity for consistent study; that teachers owe it to students to spell out clearly all details of financial arrangements so that students know what is expected; that teachers not charge smaller lesson fees or offer free instruction in exchange for the recommendation of new students to the studio.

4. It is unethical for teachers to waste students' allotted time in lengthy or multitudinous telephone calls, in eating, in telling self-aggrandizing stories.

5. It is unethical for a teacher to accept a student who is currently studying with another voice teacher.

6. It is unethical for a teacher to accept students on a limited basis, or to cancel appointments, in order to accommodate students of greater professional renown, unless this matter has been addressed during the audition and the teacher has been candid with regard to limited scheduling and the need for serving working professional singers at specific critical times.

7. In the best interests of students, taping of lessons should be

permitted, and visitors (including former teachers) should be allowed when students so request. (It is not unethical to limit such visitations if progress is compromised when visitors are present.)

8. Teachers should allow students who wish to leave the studio to do so without recrimination or bad feelings. Moreover, when interaction between teacher and student no longer achieves results, a recommendation for such action should come from the teacher.

9. It is unethical for teachers to be either possessive or controlling figures toward students, or to hold students through personal favors.

10. It is unethical to push lyric voices into unsuitable repertory.

11. It is unethical to encourage a student to continue vocal study toward professional or serious solo singing goals when the student lacks the basic vocal or musical (ear) skills. The student should be encouraged, however, to seek additional evaluation before making any decisions. The Academy also recognizes the wide variety of vocal qualities and skills accepted in non-classical professional singing and advocates the encouragement of all students to achieve their full potential.

C. Ethical Behavior between Student and Teacher

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that:

1. Students have the right to expect teachers to accept graciously their decision to go to another studio, but students should announce their decision to the teacher face to face and have an ethical responsibility to complete all financial obligations before leaving.

2. Students have the right to expect a teacher not to focus critically upon former teachers, but students have an ethical responsibility not to contribute to this problem by becoming part of a cult that publicly praises one teacher to the detriment of others.

3. Students have the right to expect their teachers to recommend them to professional contacts at the proper times, but teachers are not

managers and should not be expected to behave as agents.

4. A teacher should at all times maintain professional decorum by avoiding sexual innuendo in speech or gesture. The teacher should touch a student's body only after having asked for permission to do so, and then only in areas which would be appropriately touched in front of an audience. It is the teacher's responsibility to put an immediate stop to inappropriate sexual behavior on the part of a student by clearly informing the student when he or she is out of bounds.

5. Students have the right to expect from their teachers a consistent interest in their mental and physical well-being, but asking the teacher to behave like a pal, parent or psychiatrist is inappropriate and counterproductive. The teacher's task is to provide professional training and support.

6. Students should not be a party to a teacher's suggestion of proselytizing or pirating other studios.

D. Ethical Behavior between Teacher and Other Colleagues

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that:

1. It is unethical for voice teachers to recruit students of other teachers under any circumstances, either directly or indirectly.

2. It is unethical for voice teachers to advertise former relationships with singers without including the specific dates of the period of study. It is also unethical for students to advertise relationships with teachers on the basis of a single master class, workshop etc., without clarification of the relationship and specific dates of study.

3. It is unethical for teachers to condemn the teaching of other teachers.

4. Coaches and teachers bear an ethical responsibility to confer on a regular basis regarding the progress of their students in common. It is unethical for coaches or teachers to make derogatory remarks about the other's work.

5. It is unethical under any circumstances for a coach to teach voice.

E. Ethical Behavior in Adjudication and Auditioning within Educational Institutions and Organizations

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that:

1. It is unethical on the part of one teacher to criticize the work of an associated teacher, either by suggestion, innuendo, or in any other fashion. Mutual respect for work being performed by any associated colleague is incumbent on the part of all teachers involved.

2. It is unethical for an adjudicator to make omniscient statements, for it is impossible to know all about a singer in one or two hearings.

3. Adjudication statements should be constructive and never sarcastic.

4. Adjudicators should not assume that they know the only correct way to interpret a song or aria.

5. Whether or not an adjudicator knows the identity of a student's teacher, no allusion to methodological bias should be made.

6. Knowledge on the part of an adjudicator that a student has changed from one teacher to another should be used only for constructive criticism (e.g., the technique is in transition, etc.) It is unethical for this knowledge to reflect negatively upon either teacher.

II. Ethical Problems Which Voice Teachers Must Deal With in Regard to the Singing Profession

A. Ethical Problems Associated with Professional Management

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing Believes that:

1. When teachers have singers who are under contract with managers and/or agents, all bear an ethical responsibility to work together in close cooperation in solving the varied and complex problems involved in the promotion of a singing career.

2. If and when managers or agents, who represent direct contact between artist and public, have criticism to offer regarding a singer's work, they have an ethical responsibility to discuss such criticism directly with the voice teacher. This consideration on the part of the manager or agent is due the teacher at all times. As a result of this joint cooperative effort, the voice teacher should be allowed a reasonable time in which to overcome the causes of the manager's criticism. If at the end of a given period, the vocal or artistic problem remains unsolved, then, and only then shall the manager assume the initiative of recommending a change of teacher.

3. It is unethical for voice teachers who advise their students in matters relative to their managers to accept any fee or commission for engagements obtained for the singer. Any contract or agreement of a financial nature, written or otherwise, made between voice teacher and student shall be based upon remuneration for lessons given, and shall in no way involve any form of reimbursement to the teacher out of the professional singing engagement contract. It is unethical for teachers to assume a managerial role in their students' professional associations.

4. Any teacher receiving students on the referral of management should determine that the student is coming entirely of his own free will and is desirous of change.

5. No commission should ever be paid to, nor fee split with a manager in connection with student referral.

6. It is unethical for teachers to advertise either formally or informally that instruction in their studio will lead to a contract for representation by any management, specific or non-specific.

7. It is not unethical for teachers, if they have good professional contacts, to refer students for auditions or engagements when appropriate.

B. Ethical Considerations in Dealing with Impresarios, Conductors, Coaches, Critics, Producers and Stage Directors, including Opera Company Apprentice Programs

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that:

1. It is unethical for vocal coaches, accompanists, language and diction teachers and other assisting associates to offer advice or attempt to instruct the student in matters pertaining to vocal problems. All such matters should be referred directly and specifically to the voice teacher for proper and final solution.

2. It is unethical for language and diction teachers to advise the student on matters of style and interpretation. These phases of training should be directed to either the voice teacher or the designated coach.

3. A student should feel free to discuss with their teacher problems pertaining to the former's studies or career. In turn, teachers should give to the student the benefit of their best judgment, advice and experience. It is unethical for teachers to advise a student on professional matters in a manner detrimental to the best interests of the student.

4. Voice teachers bear an ethical responsibility to educate stage directors, producers, conductors, choreographers, etc., to those conditions which are detrimental to vocal health, to work with these professionals to develop technical solutions when dramatic and vocal demands are at cross purposes, and above all to advise students whenever the situation or repertory is judged to result in potentially dangerous consequences.

C. Ethical Problems in Dealing with Professional Competitions

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that:

1. the administrators or sponsors of any competition have an ethical responsibility to spell out carefully all rules and regulations for the competition, and all obligations required on the part of any competitor.
2. it is unethical for any competitor to be excluded or accepted into a competition on the basis of the teacher with whom he or she studies.
3. judges have an ethical responsibility to adhere scrupulously to the rules and regulations of the competition, and to remove themselves in the event of any conflict of interest (e.g., if asked to adjudicate a current or former student).
4. it is unethical for voice teachers, when judging a competition, to make any effort whatsoever to proselytize participants into their studios.
5. judges have an ethical responsibility to set aside personal prejudices regarding contestant age, repertory, etc. and adhere strictly to the stated agenda of the competition.