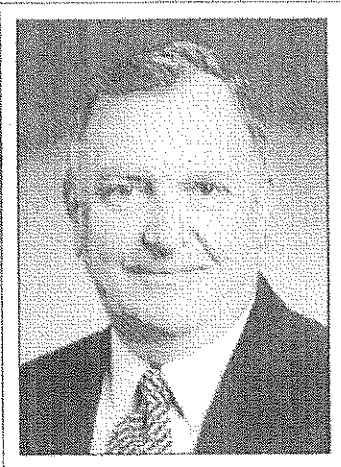


NATS Visits AATS



Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

The *Journal of Singing* continues a serial republication of selected pronouncements issued by the American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS). 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 Academy has actively written and disseminated 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.

It remains true in this country that, ostensibly, anyone can practice teaching voice in a private studio setting without needing to demonstrate a level of preparation and/or competence established by a supervising agency or accrediting association. In view of highly-structured management exercised at other levels of treating and training the human animal, this seems an anomalous circumstance. Further, when one con-

siders the intricacy of the vocal organ and the delicacy of the human psyche, the situation is even more alarming. Efforts by NATS, AATS, and MTNA (Music Teachers National Association) to generate standards of qualification for all practitioners of voice pedagogy are to be enthusiastically lauded. The following AATS Statement, changed to its present form in 1997, was originally published in 1975.



Qualifications for Teachers of Singing

The skills needed to teach music are many. The American Academy believes that the teacher of singing should possess the following requisites:

1. A thorough general and musical education, including sight-singing and ear training. A teacher must be musically literate.
2. A substantial background in vocal study with competent teachers of singing over a period of at least five years. Musical and vocal instruction should include a minimum of ninety hours each year.
3. A complete anatomical knowledge of the body (not just the vocal tract), because the vocal system relies on the whole body support system for the production of tone. For too many decades many have relied on phrases passed from studio to studio, generation to generation. Students repeat these phrases like mottos, not truly understanding the semantic implications nor the physical follow-through. Books or models of the entire anatomy should be used in teaching, to make clear the actual positions and possible functions of the organs and muscles.
4. An overview of the contiguous arts and therapies that can ease tensions and aid in such things as posture control, i.e., Alexander Technique, Feldenkreis Method, Rosen Method, massage therapies, dancing, fencing, acting, etc.
5. Sensitivity to accuracy of intonation, quality of tone, and nuance of color.
6. A broad knowledge of vocal repertory, and styles of interpretation appropriate to opera, oratorio, art song, ballad, folk song, and music theater.
7. Ability to classify a voice. It is generally acknowledged that this important decision dare not be taken hastily. Younger voices take their own time to develop since the larynx itself is still in the formative stage. Correct teaching will allow the voice to reveal its own classification. Caveat: one should not assign music too demanding for the sensitive voice, i.e., freshman voices should not sing senior music.

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8. A thorough knowledge and command of the English language; complete mastery of English diction in song through correct articulation, enunciation, and pronunciation; a knowledge of at least three languages (Italian, German, and French) encompassing basic grammar and good performance diction.
9. A basic understanding of psychology and its effective use in the teaching of singing, including a sympathetic, discerning, and analytical approach to both personal and professional problems of the student.
10. The ability to demonstrate with his or her own voice the correct principles of good tone production and interpretation. (It must be remembered that many successful and prominent teachers have not been established vocal performers, and many noted singers have not achieved success as teachers.)
11. Some competence at the piano.

In the final analysis, the teacher must have ability coupled with a compelling desire to impart knowledge.

Richard Dale Sjoerdsma received his B.A. degree from Calvin College, M.M. from the University of South Dakota, and Ph.D. from Ohio State University. Since 1968, he has been on the music faculty of Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

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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