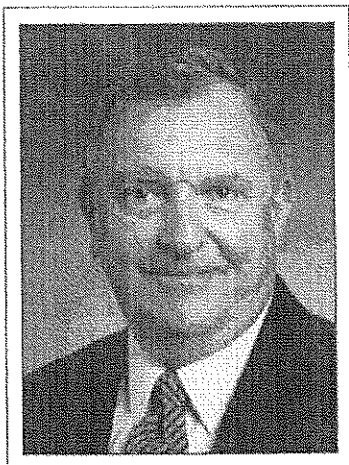


## NATS Visits AATS



Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

the Statements in the *Journal of Singing*, however, does not imply NATS endorsement, nor does their content necessarily reflect the philosophy of NATS or the *Journal of Singing*. Readers are invited to visit the AATS web site [[www.voiceteachersacademy.org](http://www.voiceteachersacademy.org)].



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 periodically be brought up to date.

Because AATS Statements arise out of the Academy as a whole rather than reflect the thinking of an individual or small group, it is important to list the organization's membership at the time of the drafting of a particular Statement. The appearance of

The Statement, "Finding the Perfect Teacher," is an updated version of an older Academy paper. It has been in process for almost a decade, and it is presented here for the first time, without comment or emendation. The first part of the Statement, which carries its title, appeared in the last issue of the *Journal* (59:1, Sept/Oct 2002). Part two represents an expansion upon the original pronouncement, and it deals with the important issue of changing teachers.

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### LEAVING ONE TEACHER FOR ANOTHER

Some teachers acknowledge their own strengths and are secure enough in their teaching to recommend students to others for help with particular needs, repertoire or projects. If such an open studio policy is in place, the need for a student to leave in order to seek these strengths in instruction is greatly reduced. If, however, after a reasonable amount of time students feel that they need something different in terms of primary voice instruction, a few guidelines and cautions may be helpful.

- A. There may be reasons for change if, over several months, one experiences any of the following: 1) an unacceptable rate of technical progress; 2) the diminution of former physical capabilities; 3) a need to listen to someone new even though the new teacher is saying the same things; 4) a need for attention and direction.
- B. With rare exceptions, three months of study, or one academic semester

ter, should be the minimum amount of study before making a change of teacher. Initial changes in your voice after two or three lessons are often temporary results of a different approach. A longer time is necessary to evaluate properly the ongoing effect of the work of any teacher.

C. Personal esthetic and the self-perception of one's own voice figure strongly in how the work done in the studio is perceived. Psychologically, one may be resistant to change or may not accurately hear the effectiveness of the "new sound." Esthetic evaluations vary widely. The public appreciates many types of vocal sound. A voice possessing adequate range and endurance and is responsive to the drama may find a market. Public reaction, often colored by dramatic ability or personality, is an unreliable guide to vocal health. Many careers, although initially successful, are shortened by faulty techniques. Good technical instruction is imperative for a long-lasting career.

### A WORD OF CAUTION

Singers have every right to make their own evaluations of any teacher. However, they should consider the level of their qualifications for making that evaluation. Although ultimately students must decide what is best for them, it is wise to consider carefully what standards are used. Students should be aware of two facts: 1) different tonal qualities result from different vocal activities; 2) different vocal actions have different effects on the voice itself. The route to vocal improvement may be circuitous and confusing to the inexperienced. The teacher's greater experience does not

guarantee superior wisdom, but odds are in favor of more informed judgment. Only after serious consideration should current teaching be rejected.

It may help students in evaluating the work with their teachers to know that most teachers agree on these issues:

1. Fatigue in the throat area after every lesson for a sustained period of time is cause for concern.
2. Feelings of stress in the throat area should be accepted only temporarily. New activity should soon feel natural and efficient.
3. Hoarseness after every lesson is cause for questioning.
4. Loss of endurance, dynamic range and pitch range is cause for questioning.
5. Singing should gradually become less stressful; breath control should become easier; and endurance, dynamic range and pitch range should increase over time.
6. Dramatic and musical ideas ought to become more readily realized.

### ETHICS AND PROCEDURES FOR LEAVING A TEACHER

A student leaving a particular studio must be honest with the teacher. If the situation is discussed, the door might still be open for the student to return should the new direction not work out. A student beginning work in another studio should be honest: not misrepresenting either work with the previous teacher or a current study relationship with the former studio. Teachers, for their part, should cultivate an open atmosphere in the studio, giving freedom to secure the expertise of other teachers and to leave that studio, if it is felt to be necessary.

Teachers who work in the capacity of "shared expertise" must honor the trust imparted and be careful not to betray that trust. Changing teachers in an academic situation should involve a third party as mediator, in keeping with existent grievance procedures.

### IN CONCLUSION

Voice study is a wonderful, liberating adventure. It offers new horizons of self-confidence and personal expression. Developing the skills that make possible the joyous release of this expression is a journey shared by student and teacher. There is no journey more fraught with emotion and frustration; no journey more rewarding.



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