

NATS Visits AATS



American Academy of
Teachers of Singing

The *Journal of Singing* continues to publish 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 (September/October 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 of the Academy periodically be brought up to date. The *Journal of Singing* has published a number of the refurbished versions, and also has premiered new Statements.

The Academy published a musicianship paper several years ago that in fact dealt with vocal technique. The Statement, "Musicianship Training for Singers," is an original document that addresses significant issues not covered in the earlier paper; it makes its first appearance in this publication. Because 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 orga-

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nization's membership at the time of the drafting of a particular Statement. The appearance of 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].

MUSICIANSHIP TRAINING FOR SINGERS

The strong musical foundation that comes with thorough training in musicianship, music theory, and piano is of utmost importance for the young singer. Singers often come to music study much later than their instrumental colleagues, for whom basic musicianship training occurs at an early age. Students and the parents who are paying for their instruction should be made aware of the insufficiency of singing lessons without the training in musicianship that is required for the development of a total musician. Learning the grammar of music is fundamental for the musical independence of the potential artist.

Teachers of young singers must begin to build musical skills as early as possible. Ideally a young singer should begin solfège, music reading skills, and other elements of musi-

icianship as early as six or seven years of age. Participation in a fine children's choir is an excellent way to begin. Such a choral program also can initiate the young singer into good vocal habits and experience with sophisticated music making. Vocalises used to develop vocal skills can be taught in a way that also develops aural and sight reading skills.

Early piano instruction is most effective in musicianship training. Piano study develops music reading and acquaints the student with counterpoint, harmony, and the opportunity to perform complete compositions, rather than the one line assigned to the singer. On the piano a singer can begin to develop at a young age the musical artistry needed for singing. Musicality (different from musicianship) and understanding of musical style can be significantly enhanced with early piano experience. Another obvious advantage of piano study is the ability it develops for the singer to play the entire score of a vocal composition. If financial considerations preclude the purchase of a piano, there are electronic keyboards available at affordable prices. Studying voice and piano on alternate weekly schedules, if necessary, is a satisfactory way of containing the costs of studying both instruments.

Richard Dale Sjoerdsma


It is often the case that singers first discover their musical gifts at fifteen or sixteen years of age in a chorus or school musical production. It is crucial that choral conductors and school music teachers have a serious musicianship training program in place. Music reading, music theory, and analysis can be made an integral part of the rehearsal process. The initial time investment of such an approach may well be offset by greater efficiency in learning and memorizing music as well as in developing musical artistry.

After the musicianship skills of solfege, sight reading, and piano are well in hand, the singer should begin the formal study of music theory, i.e., harmony, counterpoint, form and analysis, twentieth-century techniques, etc. Such study is most effective in conjunction with the historical

study of musical style. It is helpful when teachers of music theory are in conversation with voice teachers to learn teaching strategies that best serve singers.

Throughout the student's vocal training, the voice teacher should continue to develop the student's musicianship skills. Singers are well served when teachers initiate with them the

life-long practice of study and analysis of the music they sing. The ability to learn music quickly and accurately is necessary for every young artist. Singers who must use a coach for learning notes and rhythms rather than style and expression put themselves and their art at a disadvantage. Musical independence is the beginning of artistry.



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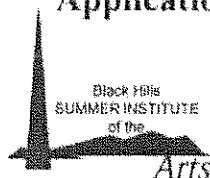
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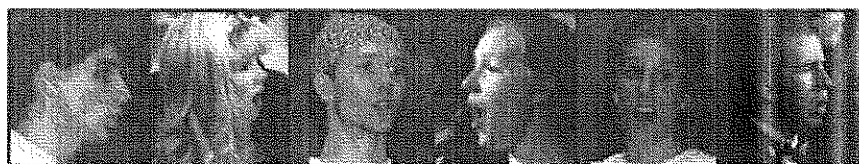


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