

Why Do You Sing?

Why do you sing?

That's not such a hard question to answer, I bet. Singing is fun! Singing is glamorous! Heck, everybody wants to be a singer. You needn't look any further than the popularity of shows like *American Idol* and *Nashville Star* to see that. Thousands of young people subject themselves to hours and hours of standing in line for a chance to show off in front of judges who may very well shred them to pieces on national television --- or make them stars overnight. Thousands more subject themselves to the same kind of scrutiny at Broadway cattle calls and opera auditions every season.

And what's not to like about singing? You get to make beautiful music that speaks to your soul, and to the souls of others. You get to make other people happy with your music. Nobody *doesn't* want to be able to sing! Every time I've admitted to a curious stranger that, why yes I am a professional opera singer or that I did a run of *Phantom of the Opera*, I get the same response: "Oh, that's so cool! I've always wanted to be able to sing. Sing something for me!" As a result I have performed in subway stations, shoe stores, fast food restaurants, and public bathrooms. Yep, no question about it, singing is a glamorous profession.

Singing on stage is even more fun. You are the STAR. You get to perform with all the colors and sound of an orchestra, blending with your voice, making it even more lovely and exciting and interesting. You get to wear beautiful costumes of velvet and silk and brocade, piles of sparkling jewelry. If you're a girl, you get to swoon and carry on and all the men onstage fight over you (or else you're busy poisoning your rivals). If you're a guy, you get to whack people around with swords and die heroically and dramatically while pretty girls weep over you or, alternatively, shrink from you in horror. You are the center of attention, with a huge fuss being made over you: sets, lights, publicity, audience --- all focused on YOU. Best of all, you get to be somebody else for a little while. You get to play make-believe, just like you did when you were a

kid, only with bigger, better toys and with other people who are talented and wonderful and love singing, too.

No, *why do you want to sing?* is not the hard question. The hard question is, *why do you want to sing for a living?*

My guess is that most young singers would answer something along the lines of, "Because I love to sing! I can't imagine doing anything else!" You want that fun and that glamour to be part of your life every single day. So do I. Nothing is better --- you can take my word for it.

The problem is getting there.

You've probably heard from parents, teachers, maybe even performers who are out there singing now, that being a professional performer is *tough* --- much tougher than you think. You've probably seen movies and TV shows showing plucky, attractive young actors and singers leaving the farm and moving to New York to pursue their dreams. They live in a crummy, roach-infested apartment, have some awful, menial job for a while, and collect some really weird friends, but after a month or two of suffering they get a Big Break and before you know it, they're big stars.

Occasionally, it works that way in real life. It might even work that way for you.

But just in case it doesn't ... wouldn't it be a good idea to have some idea of what to expect? Wouldn't it be a good idea to prepare yourself as much as possible? Wouldn't it be a good idea to have a plan, so that when you get out there you aren't wasting a lot of time and money, still not getting what you want?

The book you're holding in your hands is Volume I of a series designed to help you learn what you can expect from a singing career (including the hard-to-find answers like how much money you can expect to make), how to find a good school and a good teacher, how to be sure you're getting the most from your education, how to audition successfully, transition from student to professional singer, and more. The questions it answers are ones that get asked a LOT. They're important questions that could affect the success of not only your college career, but your professional life!

I've been where you are now. I wanted more than anything else in the world to be a singer and an actor. I wanted to travel all over the world, singing music I loved with great artists, and getting paid to do it.

When I decided to become a professional opera singer, there was nobody to help me figure out how to do that --- at least, not at first. My parents supported me, but they didn't know anything about opera. Nobody I knew did. So many of my very first, very important decisions about my education and my career were made with nothing to back them up but my own intelligence and gut feeling. I made some pretty stupid decisions and a few really good ones, but I also got lucky. I did manage to become a professional singer and actor, traveling all over the world to sing both opera and Broadway. As I write this chapter, I am sitting in a rehearsal room, listening to the orchestra of Opera Boston rehearse a production of *The Crucible*. In a few minutes, I'm going to get up and sing myself.

I am writing my book because a lot of young singers *don't* get lucky. A lot of young singers spend a whole lot of money, time, and personal resources trying to get exactly where I am right this minute. They never do, and many of them never figure out why. I want you to have better information than I did as a young singer, so maybe you won't have to make some of the same mistakes I did.

I can't guarantee that reading this book will mean you will have a singing career, or that you will never make a mistake. But I can guarantee that it will help you make better decisions about your education. It will help you get started on the right road and avoid some of the pitfalls along the way. It will, I hope, help you make your dream of a professional opera or Broadway career a reality.

So, let's get started by taking a look at one of the most important decisions you will make during your education and your career --- who will teach you how to sing?