

TAKE CHARGE!

The newsletter of *The Business of Singing*

www.thebusinessofsinging.com

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WELCOME!

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IN THIS ISSUE --- A CLEAN SLATE

Your editor has been a very, very naughty girl for the last several of months, neglecting all you lovely people. But it's been for a good cause! Where have I been and what mischief have I been up to?

Well, a quick visit to my website will show you one of the fruits of my labors. Take Charge! has been taking a hiatus while I've been finishing up my book, *The Student Singer's Starter Kit, Volume I*, an excerpt of which appears in this newsletter. Just in time for post-holiday shopping! It's especially perfect for students of singing and teachers with their own studios. In addition to lots of great information which you will not find collected anywhere else --- such as the top ten things you should learn before you graduate, how to find a good teacher, and a giant checklist of things you should be getting from your school --- there are fun, fun illustrations from the warped pen of Jared von Hindman (check his weird and funny stuff out at www.headinjurytheater.com).

I'm happy to report that *The Student Singer's Starter Kit* is now available on www.thebusinessofsinging.com, where you can purchase it via PayPal (no account necessary!) and if that doesn't please you, you may send a check for \$15.95 plus shipping and handling and I'll see that one arrives in your mailbox pronto. Don't wait too long to order your copy. This was a limited printing and at my last seminar 2/3 of the participants bought one. Email me at sales@thebusinessofsinging.com for alternative ordering information.

Besides publishing the book, I've been hitting the audition trail hot and heavy, with happy results, and this has left little time for writing. In fact, most of this newsletter was written on a plane. The next one will be coming to you from the beach in Santa Barbara, CA where I'll be rehearsing and performing *Gianni Schicchi* (yeah, read it and weep). Bragging aside, this issue is chock full of goodies! You'll find:

--- A New Theme for a New Year: Success, Health, and Prosperity in 2006

--- The Top Ten Things I Wish I'd Learned in School --- an excerpt from my new book, *The Student Singer's Starter Kit*

--- Problem? Solved! An exciting new feature in which we as a community attack a real-life dilemma (feel free to send yours in --- anonymity respected of course)!

*Also in this issue, our regular features, including Idea of the Month, Letters to the Editor, and more!

Enjoy.

ARTICLES:

A New Theme for a New Year: Success, Health, and Prosperity in 2006

Problem? Solved! Negotiating and R_E_S_P_E_C_T

The Top Ten Things I Wish I'd Learned in School

REGULAR FEATURES:

Letters to the Editor

Idea of the Month:

When's the last time?

Calendar

Parting Thought

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Cindy,

Cindy! You rock! Why didn't I think of that before? Weddings and funerals, that's the ticket! (*Ten Tremendous Marketing Tips for Non-Opera Work*, August 2005). Thank you!!! And I've been waiting tables between gigs? I live in Long Island which is probably where the most expensive weddings occur, and I live close to all the cemeteries (they are all in one place) too! I'm going to make a CD stat!

THANKS!

Rachel

Dear Rachel,

Why limit yourself to weddings and funerals? While you're at it, why not make a CD for Christmas caroling, corporate events, and chi-chi parties? Make up a brochure and a simple website. Market yourself as "Special Music for Special Occasions". Throw in a few Broadway tunes and some of the faux classical stuff that's so popular these days. Distribute a packet to wedding and event planners and funeral directors. Drop some brochures off at bridal shops and funeral parlors. Call churches and make friends with the wedding planners there! You might even think about advertising in the bridal magazines that you can pick up wherever there are gift registries.

Three students of mine, who are by no means professionals (they are talented amateurs who just like to sing and aren't looking to quit their day jobs!) just made some nice money singing for a charity fundraiser that had an "Evening in Tuscany" theme. They threw together a few of their best Italian arias, Neapolitan songs which they arranged themselves from piano-vocal scores, and even a few duets and trios. They were a huge hit and had people coming up asking for their cards (yours truly also insisted they make up some cards to keep on hand for that very reason)! Their fun hobby is turning into a lucrative one; and it can be lucrative for professional singers, too. Hey, singing work is singing work, and it can pay if you get out there and market yourself!

Good luck,

Cindy

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Hi Cindy,

I see on your website you have a sample contract. Do you have an example of a sample letter of agreement for a performance??

Best,

Jennifer T.

Hi Jennifer,

No, I don't. But it doesn't need to be anything fancy. You simply write out your stipulations in a letter format.

"Opera Company hereby offers Jennifer T. the role of Papagena in a production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, to be performed on dates XYZ in English. Artist will be compensated \$1000 per performance to be paid at intermission on the date of the last performance. Company will also provide an economy class plane ticket and housing in a patron home."

You get the idea. Just start with a list of things that are important to you, and make sure they all get into the letter. Letters of Agreement are usually pretty straightforward and brief.

Hope that helps!

Cindy

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Have a question, comment, rant or rave? Email Cindy at info@thebusinessofsinging.com with LETTER TO EDITOR in the subject heading.

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A NEW THEME FOR THE NEW YEAR: SUCCESS, HEALTH, PROSPERITY

By Cindy Sadler

New Year's Resolutions are like diets; a nice idea, but they don't work. At least, they don't work for me. So I do not do resolutions; instead, I do Themes. The idea was given to me, as so many great ideas are, from a good friend who happens to be a writer. Read all about its humorous genesis in the words of the master herself on her blog: www.ziplockhideout.com.

My own themes of years past have included The Year of Getting It Together (2003), which entailed becoming more organized in all aspects of my life and generally stopping all the fooling around. It was about commitment to goals. I put several systems into place that helped me get bills paid on time, keep better tabs on my voice studio, and track my auditions. Two years later, those systems still work, and have become routine.

2004 was the Year of Releasing That Which Does Not Serve Me. I had to look back through my old journals to find that tidbit of information out, which tells me two things: the title sucked, and the theme probably was not successful.

2005 was the Year of Taking Care – better care of myself, my husband, my businesses, our home. It meant paying more attention to detail.

My hopeful theme for 2006 is The Year of Success, Health, and Prosperity.

Here's how it works, at least for me. The theme is a reminder of the things I want to focus on this year --- sort of like setting an intention at the beginning of a yoga session. I just try to stay mindful of it, and when a decision or issue presents itself, consider Success, Health, and Prosperity as I confront it.

I start out by defining what each of these things means to me at this point in time, acknowledging that those definitions may grow and change over time. Next, I set a few goals and identify steps to achieve those goals, and I start taking some steps.

SUCCESS --- One of my definitions of success (and my friends, success is something you should ALWAYS define for yourself and NEVER allow other people to define for you) is to sing more, be paid more to sing, and work at other things less. In order to be more successful, one step I must take is to spend less time and energy on other people, and more on myself.

HEALTH --- Health for me now means, in the short term, my body being able to comfortably do what I require of it. In the long term, it means minimizing any complications. Practically, this means keeping better track of my blood sugar levels, exercising more, eating better, and yes ... always and unending ... losing weight.

PROSPERITY --- Prosperity means having plenty of money, ENOUGH money. Never having to worry about the cost of a plane ticket for an audition or if I can't get a really cheap hotel. It means planning for the future and understanding the money I do have.

So, one of the first steps I have taken for Success, Health, and Prosperity in 2006 (sounds like a campaign ticket, huh? A Vote for Success, Health, and Prosperity is a Vote for Happiness)! is to start carrying a diary around with me. This is different than my journal. (Yes, I keep a journal in addition to a blog, and all the REALLY juicy stuff is in there, but you'll have to wait 'til I die to read all THAT).

The diary is a tiny notebook that lives in my purse and is my constant companion. I used to have a food diary, a financial diary, and a place for general notes. This year, I am combining them all into one notebook. The first entry of each day I note my weight and fasting blood sugar level, followed by exercise and meds (how much exercise if any did I do, did I take all my meds?).

Next I list the balances in my bank accounts and what I have in cash. It's important for me to do this, because I have never been able to balance a check book. I just keep track of what I've got and make sure all the checks clear. I also keep running tabs on my debt. Every single day, I put that figure where I can see it, so it can't be ignored and figures prominently in all purchase decisions.

Next, in acknowledgement of human nature, I have a list of needs and wants. This list is sometimes whimsical. NEEDS: Two bras and some new underwear. A new wallet to replace the one with the broken zipper. A new PDA since my old one crashed and burned, taking all my addresses with it. WANTS: New headshot by Devon Cass. Good haircut before I go to my next opera gig. Miraculous immediate weight loss/toning and equally miraculous immediate debt elimination.

By this time all the listing has made me hungry, so the food diary comes next. I have been on every diet known to womankind, and I do not diet any more. Diets don't work. But committing to eating healthy and keeping track of what goes in the piehole DOES work, most of the time. Besides, it's good to have a record of what I've been eating in case my blood sugar goes wonky.

Finally, I have the record of everything I bought on a particular day, how much it cost, and how I paid for it; and the record of any income acquired that day.

Are you exhausted yet? Ready to poke your eyes out with a sharp stick? I'm not. I love making little lists. Ooooooh! Oooooooh! I'll add my to-do list for the day, to help me stay on top of what I need to accomplish.

This little record doesn't take as much time to compile as it sounds, and it really helps me keep on top of things. The moment this sort of information goes in, my brain leaks it out with sieve-like efficiency. So, I need a paper brain to keep all these important little details at my fingertips. It helps me track my life and see what needs more attention.

So there it is, my first step to achieving Success, Health, and Prosperity in 2006. I have other ideas, too, but I've spent enough time on you people already. (See? I'm sticking to my resolution --- er, Theme)! But I invite you to write and tell me what YOUR theme for the year is, and how you intend to fulfill it.

May your 2006 be rife, nay, LUXURIANT, with Success, Health, and Prosperity, too.

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Cindy Sadler is a professional opera singer, consultant, teacher, and writer. Her upcoming engagements include Zita in Gianni Schicchi with Opera Santa Barbara, Baba the Turk in The Rake's Progress and Third Lady in Magic Flute with Des Moines Metro Opera, as well as Bertha in Barber of Seville with Austin Lyric Opera. She recently appeared at the Astoria Music Festival in concert with Cynthia Lawrence and Clayton Brainerd, and survived her first efforts in administration as Executive Director of the Astoria Music Academy. Cindy has also just published a book, The Student Singer's Starter Kit, to help pre-college singers and their parents understand how to choose the right school and get an education that will prepare them for performance careers. She will offer highlights of her popular marketing workshops at the Third Annual Classical Singer Convention May 18 – 20 in Philadelphia, PA.

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Idea of the Month: Where's the money in your community? A lot of high-end retirement homes or gated communities have their own entertainment budget and like to bring in quality performers so their residents don't have to travel. Put together a little show and market it to these folks!

PROBLEM? SOLVED! Negotiating and R_E_S_P_E_C_T

In this new feature, each month I'll post a real-life problem and invite readers to respond. Tell us what YOU would do in this situation! I'll chime in as well. You're welcome to send in your own sticky questions. Names and details will be changed to protect the innocent! Our first dilemma:

THE PROBLEM: Our heroine sings an amazing audition and is offered the job on spot. She accepts, subject to fee negotiations. Later she is told that because her fee demands are above the usual budget and the music director was not present at the audition, she must re-audition for the entire board to prove her worthiness!

What would YOU do? Tune in next issue for the solutions ...

When's the last time ... you updated your audition spreadsheets and reviewed your season to see how you performed this season and what you could do better?

THE TOP TEN THINGS I WISH I'D LEARNED IN SCHOOL

Excerpted from *The Student Singer's Starter Kit, Volume I* by Cindy Sadler

10. You're the boss of you. One of my biggest gripes about the way musicians are educated is the attitude that is drilled into young artists --- often unintentionally, by well-meaning instructors --- that everybody knows better than they do about their own voices. Teachers, coaches, conductors, other singers --- everyone has an opinion about your voice, about how you should sing a certain aria or role, about what programs you should apply to ... the list is endless.

It is important to listen to these opinions. These people are your paid advisers, and they have a great deal of experience and knowledge. However, it is absolutely essential that you pay attention to your own instincts, and that you take an active role in your own education. In fact, you must be the LEADER of your own education and in the development of your own voice and career. Education is not something that happens to you. It is something you do yourself. You educate yourself. If you aren't getting what you need, it's no one's fault but your own if you don't go looking for it somewhere else. And if you don't *know* what you need, it's up to you to find out.

9. How to say no, and how to speak up. Along the same lines of taking ownership of your education and your career, it's very important to learn early on to say "no" --- firmly, politely, and respectfully --- to things that are not good for you and your voice. During your education and career, you will often be asked to do things that may not be in your best interests, such as sing a role which is inappropriate or that you aren't vocally ready to undertake, or to work an insane rehearsal schedule that leaves you too exhausted to give a good performance. Part of being "the boss of you" is to learn to respond to unreasonable demands with a reasoned, calm denial. This doesn't mean turning down every "stretch" you're asked to make --- as a young singer, you need to experiment and you will also be asked to work very hard under some trying circumstances. Learn to distinguish between what is reasonable and what is excessive.

You also have to learn to ask for what you need if you're not getting it. You and your parents are spending a lot of money for your education, and more than that --- you're investing valuable time. Youth is a commodity for performers; and once it's gone, you can't get it back. If there are areas of your education that are lacking, such as coursework or performance opportunities that you feel your school could provide, you should ask for them.

It's also important to remember that the fact that you are in school, paying tuition, does not *entitle* you to study with a certain teacher or to performance opportunities. Those are privileges you must earn with talent and hard work. If you are not getting these things, however, it's important to calmly, reasonably, find out *why*, and what you can do to change the situation.

8. To refuse to stay in a bad situation. As a professional consultant, I hear many sad stories from people who had bad experiences with their educations, with teachers and

educational institutions that admitted them, took their money, but did not nurture, support, or guide them. Tragically, many of these singers stayed because they didn't know what else to do, and often they allowed the pain and the damage done by these situations to affect their future careers. I myself spent nearly two years with an abusive and incompetent teacher because ... well, I was young and dumb and it took me that long to figure it out.

If you aren't getting what you need from your school or your voice teacher, and you have made honest efforts to effect change, *don't stay*. Yes, it's a hassle to change schools, but it will be a bigger hassle to try to get your career off the ground without a solid vocal technique or roles on your resume. Don't waste your time or your money if you aren't getting good service.

7. To embrace the experience to the fullest. Your college years are a wonderful time of growth and learning, and not just in the classroom. My irascible Aunt Toots, a linguistics professor and world traveler (she lived in India with her toddler and later in Poland) always said, "Never let school or work interfere with your life." There's much to be learned outside the classroom and the library, and it will enrich you as a performer. Perform as much as you can. Hear as much live music as you can. See as much art and theater as you can. Ask a lot of questions. Have a whole lot of fun.

6. How to network. Networking is an essential part of any performer's career. Anyone you meet is a potential contact, and you never know where that contact might lead. I have gotten more singing jobs from recommendations from other singers, conductors, and directors than I ever have from cold auditions, and most singers I know say the same thing.

I'm not a natural networker. Fortunately, it's a skill that can be learned. Now, while you're in school, make a habit of remembering people's names and details about them. Make a habit of meeting and chatting with important people whose path cross yours --- guest artists, visiting faculty, other students who seem to be really on the ball. Make a habit of staying in touch with people. Learn to be a good listener. That's all that networking really is, after all. It's talking to people. If you're not good at it naturally, like me, then learn how to fake it!

5. To develop interests and marketable skills outside your area of study. Theater can take over your life. Staying alive and financially afloat can, too. It's really important to keep balance both during your studies and later, when you're struggling to get your career off the ground. Always make time for friends and family; always make time to do things you like that make you feel good. The work will always be there, but friends, family, and fun won't. Plus, the people and things that support you and make you happy are essential to your health and well being not only as a person, but also as a performer.

In addition to interests that take you away from that seductive and overwhelming world of theater, you need to spend some time NOW developing marketable skills that will help you when you're trying to get your career going.

Here's a scary little tip: unless you are a complete freak of nature (or you luck out and get into a Broadway show straight out of college), it is highly unlikely that you will make enough money by singing alone to support yourself during the developmental years of your career. You will probably find yourself participating in the hallowed theatrical tradition of having a day job that supports your singing habit. And that day job is going to have to be something flexible, to allow for your audition, lesson, rehearsal, and performance schedule. Many such jobs are low-paying, soul-sucking helltraps that barely pay enough to keep you in singer chow with a leaky roof over your head, let alone pay off your student loans.

So if you have to have a soul-sucking day job, at least prepare yourself for a soul-sucking day job that pays well. Or better yet, one that doesn't suck and still pays well. Anything having to do with computers is good. Graphic design, consulting, editing, personal training, massage therapy, bookkeeping, sales, teaching voice or piano, seasonal construction work --- any skills that allow you to get a day job with the flexibility, freedom, and finances to pursue your real work are what you should be cultivating. If you must take the dreaded temp job (temporary employment, usually low-paid clerical work) then go in for legal secretarial work. It pays better and often has better perks; plus chances are you'll be working with people who are supporters of the arts and interested in what you do.

4. Self-perspective. One of the most critical skills a singer can possess is the ability to unemotionally assess her own talent, development, image, and package in relationship to others in the business. In addition to learning how to sing and act, and all the other subjects that go into making you a proper musician, you must spend your college years learning what it takes to be a successful singer. Do you have what it takes? If you don't have it now, can you expect to develop it in a reasonable amount of time? As a student, you will be tempted to measure your success by how much progress you're making. That progress is important, but don't forget to keep an eye on the competition and develop an awareness of how you measure up.

3. To think of yourself as a businessperson as well as an artist.

In school, it's easy to spend all your time on the monumental task of developing yourself as an artist --- but don't forget to develop yourself as a businessperson as well. It is essential to educate yourself on the classical singing industry as well as the art form. You should regularly read industry publications such as *Opera News*, *Classical Singer Magazine*, and the *Musical America Directory*. You should know the names of important general directors, conductors, singers, managers, Young Artists' Programs (YAPs), competitions, and opera companies. You should know who is singing where on the regional circuit, and not just the big stars --- who are the up and coming singers? Who is winning the competitions? These are the people you will be competing with in a few years.

2. To develop a plan for the first five years after graduation. I can't tell you how many young singers I meet who think that the first thing they do after getting their

diplomas is move to New York, get an agent, and start their singing careers. If only it were so easy. The reality is that you will probably spend several years on the YAP circuit (participating in them if you're lucky, just trying to get in one if you're not) and working intermittently in small regional houses. A manager will not be interested in you until there is a career there to manage. So what do you do in the meantime?

You have to have a plan. You have to know how much time, money, and effort you can devote to developing your career. You have to effectively target the YAPs, opera companies and managers you want to sing for. You have to know where you are going to live and what you are going to do for money while you're running what is essentially a small business --- with you filling every role from CEO to marketing department to executive secretary to janitor.

A plan makes sense of what can be an overwhelming maze. It can help you establish and track reasonable goals and prevent you from wasting time and money pursuing projects that don't fit your overall vision for yourself. And it can help you establish a successful singing career.

1. Sometimes, the best thing you can do is break the rules. You've been taught, and held to, rules all your life. You're about to be taught a whole lot more of them. The trick is not to take any of them too seriously, and that includes everything I've written in this book.

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Order your own copy of THE STUDENT SINGER'S STARTER KIT at www.thebusinessofsinging.com, or by sending an email to sales@thebusinessofsinging.com.

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CALENDAR

JANUARY 28 & 29

Center Stage Opera, Reseda, CA, announces auditions for a no pay, no fee, fully staged production with orchestra of *Così fan tutte*. All roles open, including covers and chorus. Performances May 13, 20, and 21, 2006.

Auditions are Saturday January 28th, and Sunday January 29th, both beginning at noon. \$10 audition fee, accompanist provided. Please send your audition requests to centerstageopera@yahoo.com, and they will email you location and specific audition time information.

FEBRUARY - MARCH

Cindy will be in Santa Barbara, CA rehearsing *Gianni Schicchi* throughout the month of February. If you're in the area and would like to book a one-on-one consultation, now's a great time! If there's enough interest, Cindy will use one of her days off to give a mini-marketing workshop. Email info@thebusinessofsinging.com for more info.

FEBRUARY 25 - MARCH 5

Meanwhile, here's your chance to hear Cindy put her money where her mouth is as Zita in Gianni Schicchi!

GIANNI SCHICCHI

Opera Santa Barbara

Box Office: (805) 898-3890

Saturday, February 25, 7:30 pm, Lobero Theatre

Friday, March 3, 7:30 pm, Lobero Theatre

Sunday, March 5, 2:30 pm, Lobero Theatre

Be sure to come backstage and say hi.

MARCH 26

Evanston Symphony is looking for a soprano and a tenor to cover Jonita Lattimore and Kenneth Gayle at a **March 26, 2006** symphony concert at **Pick Staiger Auditorium** in Evanston, IL at **2:30 pm**. If you are interested in covering this concert, please email Genevieve Thiers (gthiers@operamoda.com) and include a bio and resume. (Sound clips of some kind would also be appreciated; please send them electronically or direct us to a Web site where we can hear them.) There is no pay, but this is a great chance to sing with orchestra and work on your repertoire!

MAY 18-20

Cindy will speak and consult at the 3rd Annual Classical Singer Convention in Philadelphia, PA. See www.classicalsinger.com for details.

JUNE - JULY

Cindy will be at Des Moines Metro Opera rehearsing *The Rake's Progress* and *Magic Flute*. If you're in the area and would like to book a one-on-one consultation, now's a great time! If there's enough interest, Cindy will use one of her days off to give a mini-marketing workshop. Email info@thebusinessofsinging.com for more info.

Come hear Cindy as Baba the Turk and Third Lady! Performances are as follows:

The Rake's Progress

June 24

July 2,7,12,15

The Magic Flute

June 23,25,30

July 8,13,16

For ticket info, contact the Des Moines Metro Opera Box Office at (515) 961-6221 or visit www.dmmo.org.

Do you have a performance or event you'd like to see listed on the calendar? Email info@thebusinessofsinging.com with CALENDAR in the subject line.

PARTING THOUGHT

The richest gifts we can bestow are the least marketable.
- Henry David Thoreau