

TAKE CHARGE!

The newsletter of *The Business of Singing*

www.thebusinessofsinging.com

June/July 2005

Volume I, no. 8

WELCOME!

All content copyright 2005, Cindy Sadler; except “*Je Suis Tytania*”, which is copyright 2005 Tytania Strange and “*Crown Yourself King of the Mass Mailing Jungle*”, which is copyright 2005 Anna K. Cox-Havron. All Rights Reserved. Please do not reproduce in any fashion without written consent of the author.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Don't look for a newsletter in July. I have joined the Dark Side and become Executive Director of the Astoria Music Academy --- that's right, an administrator, but don't worry, it's not permanent though it may be catching --- and alas, will have no time to write. But stay tuned for Tales from the Dark Side when I return in August!

IN THIS ISSUE

*It's raining letters! June has been a bonanza month for **Letters to the Editor**, and I love it. Keep 'em coming. And while you're at it, let's hear about what topics you'd like to see addressed in this newsletter. Don't be shy!

*We would have expected no less than a big bang from our new columnist, Tytania Strange's first offering. Last month she translated the opera company-centric house budget categories into a singer-friendly system. In this issue of **Take Charge!**, Tytania gives up her own take-no-prisoners audition strategies.

*Why not save money on travel and send video audition tapes instead? Can you get jobs by taking the general director out to dinner? Thought about plumping up your skimpy resume by creating an award for yourself? In **What Kind of Car Are You?**, Cindy explores industry-savvy marketing strategies for opera singers --- and some strategies that aren't so savvy.

*Also in this issue, our regular features, including Idea of the Month, an article by organizational expert Anna K. Cox-Havron showing you how to manage a massive mailing list, news, a calendar of events, and more!

Enjoy.

ARTICLES:

What Kind of Car Are You? *Why opera singers must be mindful of marketing techniques* by Cindy Sadler

Je Suis Tytania: Tytania's Take-No-Prisoners Audition Strategies by Tytania Strange

Crown Yourself King of the Mass Mailing Jungle by Anna Cox-Havron

REGULAR FEATURES:

Letters to the Editor

Idea of the Month: Do-It-Yourself Summer School

When's the last time?

News

Calendar

Parting Thought

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Cindy,

I just received my very first *Take Charge!* today in my email. I can't thank you enough for what you do to make our lives easier. It's definitely put me in a new frame of mind about my career and to just get off my butt! Best of all...you've brought Tytania in. As much as she frightens me on the New Forum for Classical Singers, I just can't get enough of her! She's always so right on top of things, just like you. The combo of the two of you is one that can't be beat. The posts that you and Tytania write are what I make sure that I ALWAYS read. So thanks!

Yvonne

===

Hi Yvonne,

Lordy, I'm just blushing and if Tytania were the type, which she is not, I'm sure she would be blushing, too. It's hard to get people to be straight with you in this business --- we are all too busy making sure our behinds aren't hanging out in the wind, providing large, enticing targets for someone else's foot. That's what makes our Fairy Queen so refreshing, and her insights just too valuable to be confined to the forums. I hope that her writings here will find the larger audience and following she deserves.

Thank you!

Cindy

===

Cindy,

I was wondering if you could give me some advice about getting started. I graduated with my music degree a few years ago and have been working my day job. Recently I've been having trouble figuring out what I should do to get my career started and I've been getting really down because I can't see the end of my day job and the beginning of my singing career. Some advice would really be appreciated.

Kat

==

Dear Kat,

It makes me so mad that young singers don't get this kind of training in conservatory. That's one reason I started giving my **Business of Singing** workshops, consulting, and writing. This is exactly the kind of thing I help singers --- and not just beginning singers --- learn how to do. I've developed a detailed questionnaire to help my consultation clients clarify what they want and who they are as performers, and then I help them figure out how to go about getting it.

Everybody needs a plan, but before you can make a plan, you have to know what you've got to work with. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a singer and as a performer?

Next, you have to know what you want out of this business. What kind of singing do you want to do? What kind of career do you want to have?

Have you set goals for yourself --- goals that you can break down, step by step, to help you get where you want to go?

Who else is out there right now who is singing the repertoire you want to sing? What would you have to do to be getting the same jobs? What jobs are right for you to be applying for now?

These are just a few questions to get you started. I can help you develop a detailed business plan and show you how to make the most of your resume, bio, and headshot; when and where to send them; how to follow up and network and all that good stuff that gets a career moving. Shoot me an email at info@thebusinessofsinging.com if you'd like to get started. Also check out my article below which discusses why certain marketing strategies work for an opera career and others don't.

And good luck!

Cindy

==

Hello Ms. Sadler,

I am a singer, mezzo-soprano. I graduated music conservatory in Kiev (Ukraine). I am well-known singer here in Kiev and I have a lot of concerts in Ukraine, but I would like to have concert tours in United States and in Europe. It is very difficult, because my country was in seclusion from other world a lot of years. We lived in USSR. Now my country is free, but we don't have any concert agencies at all. Could you tell me, how can I start it? Probably you know good agency which can work with singer from other country? Or orchestras and conductors who are looking for good mezzo-soprano?

I visited your site, and found your pictures from Opera "Eugeny Onegyn". I sang this opera too. Tell me please, which language did you use in your direction? Which other Russian Operas are there in America?

Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,

Liliya

====

Hi Liliya,

There are not very many agencies in the US that specialize in concert work, and unfortunately, if you are completely unknown in the West, it may be difficult to get started even if you are well-known in your own country.

Do you do opera as well as concert work? If so, I suggest that you email David Blackburn, who runs the New York International Opera Auditions (NYIOPS). This is not an agency; it is a company that brings European opera houses to the US to hear American singers and also has just begun holding auditions in Germany. The NYIOP auditions would be a good way for you to be heard by many potential employers at one time. They are currently hearing auditions in Berlin. You will find information at www.nyiop.com.

I also suggest that you put together your resume (CV), biography, headshot (photo), and a cover letter introducing briefly who you are, a little about your experience, and what kind of work you are seeking, and send it along with a demo CD (sample of your singing) to various agents in the US and Europe. You can find this information in several directories:

For the US and some European houses, you can subscribe online or order a hard copy of the Musical America directory at www.musicalamerica.com.

For Great Britain, get the British Music Yearbook :

www.rhinegold.co.uk/index.htm

For Germany, get the Deutsche Bühnen Jahrbuch :

www.buehnengenossenschaft.de/dtbuehnenbuch.htm

You can also visit my other website, www.thebusinessofsinging.com, for lots of information about how to get your career started in the US.

I did *Evgeny Onegyn* in Russian. Ya na gavarit pa-ruski! But I studied it a little, and we had a score that had been transliterated from the Cyrillic and a Russian coach from Georgia who taught us the diction.

Russian opera is just starting to be done more frequently in the US. There are some

prominent Russian conductors here, such as Valery Gergiev at the Metropolitan Opera, and Valery Ryvkin, who runs the much smaller Opera Santa Barbara in California. Maestro Gergiev has brought over many Russian singers. There is also a large Russian population in San Francisco, California, and the San Francisco Opera is a major company which does Russian and Czech repertoire. They have done *Ruslan and Ludmila* fairly recently. The Met has recently done *War and Peace*. Other Russian operas that are sometimes (but not often) produced are *Pique Dame*, *Love for Three Oranges*, and *Rake's Progress* (always in English). *Evgeny Onegyn* is the only Russian opera that is regularly done by the smaller companies. Only the very biggest generally do Russian opera, because often they require large casts and many large voices. There is probably more Czech opera produced than Russian. And frequently, Russian opera is done in English, German, or French, because Russian is unfamiliar to most American singers (we all learn Italian, German, and French in conservatory, but Russian and Czech aren't usually taught). However, since so many Russian singers have come here, this is changing, and Russian and Czech opera are done in original language more often.

If you plan to sing opera in the US, you will need to be able to sing in Italian, German, French, and English; and take direction in English. The largest international houses (the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, etc.) usually have stage managers who give the calls in several different languages, depending on what languages are spoken by cast members; but the stage direction and musical preparation are in English. Most companies do the operas in their original languages.

Good luck to you!

Sincerely,

Cindy

===

Hi Cindy,

I don't know if you remember me, but we had a phone consultation last fall and you gave me a list of some summer programs to apply to. I wanted to give you an update on the results of those auditions, and I have a question about how to list these things on my resume.

I'm going to IIVA in Chiari, Italy from June 19 - July 17. I'm super excited as I have only been to Italy once before for 2 weeks on a family vacation. My Italian is not great right now, so I'm looking forward to the opportunity to work on that. They are not doing a full opera, but big chunks from lots of operas. I am doing Adina, Zerlina and Musetta as well as a small role in *Suor Angelica* (my 3rd time doing this opera in 2 years, 3rd different role!) I'm not sure how to list these, with Adina and Zerlina, I would say that I'm doing about 3/4 of the role, all the arias and big scenes. We are only doing Act 2 of *Boheme*, which is mostly Musetta. My inclination is to put them under operatic scenes and roles in repertoire. They said to learn the entire roles if we could and then we could coach them there. What do you think?

In August I'm doing New Jersey Opera Theater in Princeton, NJ. In addition to the operas, they're doing a concert called "Beaumarchais Plus" where there will be entire acts from 3 different lesser known Beaumarchais operas. I'm singing the Countess in Corigliano's *Ghosts of Versailles*. I have the same resume question as above?

Thank you so much again for all your help and encouragement, I did a lot of auditions and now I get to do two great programs this summer. I'm really excited!!!

Looking forward to your response,

Liz

==

Hi Liz,

Yes, of course I remember you. Congrats on going to IIVA. I did that program waaaaaay back when, before it was anyplace other than Israel and the US. I credit the work I did there with helping me get into the Chicago Lyric apprenticeship!

I would list, under Upcoming Engagements, as follows:

Adina L'elisir d'amore (excerpts) International Institute of Vocal Arts, Italy
etc.

Later you can move them to Opera Excerpts, and since you don't have much full-role experience on your resume, you can be more explicit about what exactly you did. For example, you can list:

Opera Excerpts

Musetta Act II, La Boheme

Adina Act I aria, Act II duet (I'm just making this up, I'm not so familiar with Elisir that I know who sings what when, but you get the picture)

and so on.

If you do learn the whole role, list that as a role in repertoire as well. Remember, you'll be removing the Opera Excerpts category as soon as you have more full role experience anyway.

For the NJOT, I think you have to list this as a concert performance or as opera excerpts and do it the same way:

Countess The Ghosts of Versailles (Act X) NJOT

Have a great time this summer and please let me know how it goes!

Thanks,

Cindy

====

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

WHAT KIND OF CAR ARE YOU?

By Cindy Sadler

You know, there's nothing wrong with being a working singer.

There are many, many ways to be employed as a professional musician. Voice teachers who sing small roles with local opera companies and symphonies and community theater are professional musicians. Choristers with the Santa Fe Desert Chorale and day jobs are professional musicians. People who teach kiddie music classes and are paid soloists for their church choirs are professional musicians. People who create and market their own unique concert series or make money doing outreach in schools are professional musicians. All of them deserve respect for finding or inventing creative jobs in the field of music.

I hope I've made my point that there's nothing wrong with doing any of those things and still calling yourself a professional musician. It's not selling out. It's not prostituting oneself for the art. These diverse gigs may be the career you've crafted for yourself, or they may be the route you're taking to get to a different career goal. Regardless, no one of us should ever let anyone else define for us what makes us professional, or successful. And each of the aforementioned jobs call for some creative marketing techniques, real out-of-the-box thinking.

But you have to be careful about how you apply those techniques to building your *opera* career. Like it or not, there are rules. You can bend them, you can break them, you can rewrite them to make them work for you. What you can't do is pretend like they don't exist.

LEARN HOW YOUR INDUSTRY FUNCTIONS

There are plenty of gurus out there willing to give advice to singers, and there are plenty of singers out there happy to be advised. Make sure you know where your information is coming from --- what works beautifully for selling condos or magazines or seats at a seminar, or even for selling your fabulous concert idea or school outreach program --- does not necessarily translate to selling yourself in a *traditional* opera career. You have to understand how the surprising conservative opera business actually works before you can circumvent all the usual firey hoops.

Case in Point Number One: a very talented tenor friend of mine, may he rest in peace, had had a very untraditional musical education and career. He truly had a world-class voice, and could have sung on any number of opera stages. However, he hadn't an inkling of how the business worked and was deaf to all advice. A devoted and knowledgeable

technogeek, he was convinced that if he produced a fancy and expensive video of him singing his arias, as well as a flashy packet of materials, he could send it around to all the opera companies and they would hire him from this video. It was so logical! Think of the money he would save on audition trips! He would simply not hear that few opera companies will even listen to unsolicited demo CDs, let alone make special arrangements to watch a video; and virtually no one would cast from a CD or video alone, particularly if the singer were an unknown. He spent thousands of dollars developing and mailing these beautiful materials --- money which could have been spent on voice lessons, coachings, and audition trips --- and did not receive a single response. Not one. Tragically, it broke both his heart and his will to pursue opera as a career, and the world was robbed of a truly great tenor voice.

Now, if you were a marketer for a corporation, you might think my friend's idea was brilliant. And it might have worked brilliantly if he were presenting himself for, say, wedding work or school tours or cruise ships. But opera companies have a protocol from which they rarely stray, for the very good reason that they are always pressed for time and personnel. The only way an "out of the box" treatment like this is going to get a serious look is if it were to come with a major recommendation from a respected source, and even then it would probably be looked on as a favor. And yes, you would still have to audition.

There are some progressive companies out there who like to receive materials by email, who research you by visiting your website, and who might be open to innovative marketing methods. Before you bust into your piggybank, make sure you know which ones they are.

Case in Point Number Two: an extremely talented and accomplished singer of my acquaintance is always looking for ways to move her career forward. She decided to form her own singers' cooperative management company, and also was considering trying to market herself and her husband as a team. She had many creative ideas and established what she thought would be some good selling points. These included the ideas that the opera companies would be more likely to hire the co-op singers because they would save on managers' commissions; and also that opera companies would see a husband/wife team as an advantage because, among other things, they would only have to pay for one hotel room and one rental car.

What she didn't understand was that the opera company doesn't give a rodent's backside about manager commissions --- that's between you and him, and doesn't even enter into fee negotiations. Or that any opera company of size pays for your plane ticket, but a great many of them do not provide housing and therefore don't care how many singers are bunking together; furthermore, it's very rare for a company to provide a rental car. Also, there are many reasons why an opera company might NOT want a husband/wife team; reasons which would need to be addressed and fears allayed.

I hate being the one to roll out a litany of "This is why I think that won't work", but I hate even more watching a talented and creative friend spin her wheels. The tag-team singing idea could be a good one with a little tweaking; she needs find the true selling points rather

than basing her perceived selling points on erroneous assumptions. For example, she could focus on the fact that she and her hubby sing compatible repertoire and have stage chemistry. They could work up a concert program and establish themselves as a performing team, inviting local general directors to their shows. If they establish themselves on a local level, they have a better chance of moving up the operatic food chain, although they must be careful to avoid being seen as joined at the hip, lest one spouse lose contracts because some employers aren't interested in the other. As for the singers' cooperative ... I'm not convinced of its usefulness for growing a career in opera, although it might work well for other types of singing. One of the most important jobs a manager does for you is make connections that you would have a hard time making yourself. Another is to negotiate contracts and handle difficulties that arise when you're on site. In a singer's cooperative, even if another singer was handling these tasks, how effective could they be in negotiating a difficult situation with a company they themselves would like to work for?

Case in Point Number Three: I recently read an article chock-full of marketing advice in a publication which caters largely to developing singers. It was written by a marketer whose bio for his business dealings was quite impressive; but he did not seem very familiar with the classical music industry, which left me wondering what criteria was used in determining his qualifications to make his expertise relevant to singers, particularly the audience he was reaching.

His suggestions included inviting a general director to dinner along with your manager in order to get him to hire you. The writer did have the presence of mind to suggest that this would probably only work if you already had an established relationship with the GD AND had had a really good audition AND had gotten feedback that the GD was interested. Among the many issues he failed to address were the fact that it is extremely rare to receive feedback from auditions, even if you ask for it, or that if you and your manager know a GD well enough to seal a deal over dinner, such a move probably wouldn't be necessary. I'm not at all convinced the writer understood that many singers and GDs fly in to audition sites or that there is a spread out time frame involved in the auditioning/decision-making process. Although he acknowledged that his idea would be expensive to realize, somehow I don't think he was factoring in plane tickets and hotel to fly yourself and your manager to Cleveland, San Francisco, New York, or wherever this fictional GD is located three weeks after your audition, to take him to dinner and "seal the deal", assuming he would make time in his calendar for such a thing. Or maybe he just thought you could expense it. What disturbs me so much about the appearance of this kind of well-meaning but misguided advice is that somewhere, some young singer is going to believe the business works this way and is either going to waste a whole lot of money, or make a such a fool of himself that no one will take him seriously.

IS ALL FAIR IN LOVE AND MARKETING?

Some marketers claim that tactics are fair --- no matter how cheesy the sell, if people buy it, who cares? There is something to be said for that attitude. After all, the point of advertising is to be memorable. But I question whether cheese sells class. Let's take a look at advertising practices.

Think about an ad for a discount store, one that sells cheap merchandise or used cars or rent-to-own furniture. If the ad is in print, it will be crowded with pictures and text, much of which may be simply product names and prices, or an attempt at folksy humor. If the advertisement is on television, it often features a character who is *intended* to be charming and memorable.

Does this type of advertising reach its market? It must. Agencies keep producing these types of ads, so there must be some kind of return on them.

Now think about an ad for a luxury product --- diamonds, expensive cars, high-end fashion. Print ads for these types of items are quite streamlined. Sometimes they have no text other than the name of the company --- the product, beautifully photographed, does the talking for them. The very lack of clutter denotes elegance and casual refinement --- no need to try so hard, the product speaks for itself. A television commercial might feature classical music in the background and more beautiful images of the product --- you will never see a man in a funny hat shouting out what he hopes will become a popular catchphrase.

Do these ads reach their market? Again, they must, since reputable ad agencies continue to produce them, and the products continue to sell.

What these two very different types of marketing have in common is an approach tailored to their specific markets. But their markets are very different! You wouldn't have much success trying to sell a Rolls Royce as if it were a jalopy from Honest Bob's Discount Car Lot. And a closeup, slow-scroll shot of a single can of bathroom cleaner probably wouldn't bring the customers rushing into Walmart.

The questions you must ask yourself as an opera singer are, are you a Tiffany diamond or a pink rhinestone? Michael Kors or Jaclyn Smith for Kmart? A Rolls Royce or an El Camino? Are you marketing yourself to the demographic that shops at Bergdorf Goodman or at Walmart?

EMBRACE YOUR INNER CHEESE

It's no big secret that image is increasingly important in the classical singing industry. One has only to look at Anna Netrebko's opera videos, or the handsome popera groups that are springing up like weeds in a Charlotte Churchyard to understand that. But image is more than how you look: it encompasses who you are, as well.

A good actor understands that any character and any acting choice, comic or tragic, must be grounded in truth and authenticity for it to work. The same is true of the image you use to market yourself as a singer. If you are, by nature, more Honest Bob than Renée Fleming, then by all means embrace your plaid sportsjacket and combover. You'll probably be a great Dulcamara or Martha Schwerlein or Auctioneer. But underlying that exterior had better be genuine charm and at least a touch of class. Opera, ultimately, is wedded to a special kind of glamour, and opera singers are expected to have some personal elegance.

And if you do owe more in the way of personal image to La Fleming, or even if you aspire to, you'd be well advised to keep that in mind when presenting yourself to potential opera company employers. Save the chummy newsletters for your Christmas list or wedding/corporate event/cruise clients and send a sleek postcard with your season announcements instead, followed by a more informal email fleshing out a few more details. Forget about plumping up your resume with made-up awards (it's been suggested). Unknown awards and certifications are meaningless on a resume anyway, and given the recent brou-ha-ha on a very public bulletin board over a singer's ever-so-slightly inaccurate and completely unintentional "misrepresentation" of a major award he actually did win, imagine what companies will think when they find out you invented one for yourself --- and they will find out. Forget suggestions like searching for exposure by volunteering at the local opera guild, unless it's a very, very small operation or you are hoping to be seen as a potential board member rather than a potential artist. (Contrary to what you might think, few opera companies want to promote a singer who came up through the ranks of their own company as a star, because it makes them look provincial --- something local companies truly dread). These techniques might work very well for certain types of publicity and job-seeking, but they would be detrimental to a singer who hopes to grow an exclusive opera career.

SO ... WHAT?

I've spent a great deal of time in this column telling you what NOT to do, and why certain ideas, terrific when applied correctly, would backfire when attempted under the wrong circumstances. I fully expect that some readers will think I'm just a cranky naysayer. But there's a difference between a Pollyannaish disregard of critical analysis, and true positive thinking. True positive thinking is open to all possibilities ... even the possibility of being wrong!

In the next issue of Take Charge!, I will dedicate this space to suggesting workable ways to go about growing your opera career.

Cindy Sadler is a professional opera singer, consultant, teacher, and writer. Her upcoming engagements include concerts at the Astoria Music Festival in Oregon, Zita in Gianni Schicchi with Opera Santa Barbara, and Bertha in Barber of Seville with Austin Lyric Opera. She has also recently been appointed Executive Director of the Astoria Music Academy, where she will present her Business of Singing workshops and vocal technique master classes this summer. Cindy is also writing a book 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.

Idea of the Month: Do-it-yourself Summer School and Boot Camp. Ah, the lazy, hazy days of summer. If you aren't spending the hot months at a training program, YAP, or festival, you probably feel a bit lonely and out of touch with the business. You may feel like you're falling behind --- but you don't have to! Now is the time to be sprucing up your top five arias for the fall auditions and adding those alternates, tweaking your resume and bio, schedule an informal recital or Aria Abend to make sure your audition

chops are up to par, and to prepare a mailing list to request those fall auditions. Now is also the time to lose those extra five pounds or hit the gym to tone up. So plan a mini-regimen for yourself, and stick to it! You'll be glad when the fall audition season rolls around and you don't feel like you just got out of bed after a long, lazy nap.

JE SUIS TYTANIA

Tytania's Take-No-Prisoners Audition Strategies

By Tytania Strange

Have you ever woken up and found yourself consumed with the evil notion of blowing an audition, just to save yourself the trauma and misery of worrying about whether or not they'll ask for a second aria and praying that they'll like you? Obviously, none of us would ever plan to sing badly or make jerks out of ourselves on purpose, but we all know that offering an unknown opening aria that has a slow tempo and lasts for eight minutes will pretty much guarantee a "Thank you and get out." Better yet, offer Zerbinetta's aria or "Sempre libera." Works like a charm. It saves wondering what they'll choose for a second selection, because there won't be one. Don't you just hate that moment where you're standing up there like a fool while they decide whether or not to hear another aria? It's only slightly less miserable than having someone yell "Thank you!" before the last note of the postlude has died away.

In the end, I always opt to sing the short, perky aria that will get me to a second piece. You'd think that a person could sing one aria that shows off everything under the sun and that would be enough. It isn't. I've talked to far too many administrators who will flat out tell you that after the audition is over, they assume that the singers they liked best were the ones who sang the most. It doesn't matter how wonderful that single cavatina-cabaletta was, or that it showed everything the panel could have possibly needed to hear and every note was perfection. It's still only one aria. So, we're all stuck aiming for that second piece.

When people talk about audition strategy, they almost always tell you to sing what you sing best. If what you sing best happens to be short, interesting and falls within a broad definition of standard repertoire, then it's excellent advice. If your best aria is twelve minutes long, rarely heard in auditions and isn't from one of the top ten most frequently performed operas, then it's time to think about singing your second best piece- provided it's short. That first piece is your chance to show the panel who you are, what you sound like and to pique their interest enough that they will want to hear what else you can do. It's not necessarily the time to sing your highest note or push yourself to the absolute limits of your potential unless there's a reason why they can't possibly get along without someone who has your extreme abilities. No one hires the singer who sings the highest note, because they don't need excess high notes. They hire the singer who has a lovely voice, an interesting personality and performs up to a consistently high standard of singing. The notes above the staff, the volume that can tear up a city block and the vocal histrionics are just icing. Icing is great, but nobody wants it without cake. Cake on the other hand, is darn tasty all by itself.

I've often wondered how the heck people are supposed to know what their best aria is. Does the magic audition fairy flutter down to smack you in the face with the clue wand? Are choruses of angels and teddy bears heard singing in the sky? From whence does this wisdom flow? Alas, this is one that we have to figure out for ourselves. If you're getting the desired result by singing a certain aria, then it's working. If you're not being seriously considered, then it's time to take a long hard look at some of your choices. Our teachers and coaches can help, but ultimately, it's our butts up there auditioning and our careers on the line. None of us enjoy taking that long hard look in the mirror when things aren't working, but if we want to work, then we have to do it. Self-assessment is never fun, but it's a crucial business skill.

One of the problems with self-assessment is figuring out what we're supposed to be assessing in the first place. It's easy enough when our singing isn't up to par, but what are we supposed to do when we're singing rings around our repertoire and things still don't seem to come together? Obviously, some other strange and incomprehensible logic is at play. Auditions are very rarely about finding the best singer. They're about finding the singer who fits the criteria du jour and very few people will tell you what that is. Often, the panel is looking for someone they know, either directly or by reputation. Beyond that, you can always show up early enough to get a bead on the singers that seem to be making a great impression versus the ones who don't. If you know the panel is going wild for English arias and seems to be uninterested in the people offering bel canto, you can tailor your choices to fit.

I hate reading *Opera News*, I hate it with the flaming hate of a thousand flaming hateful things, but it is an interesting place to track casting trends. Okay, I'm not at the Met, but all the people who are hiring me are reading that stupid magazine and what do you think small monkeys do when they notice what the big monkey in NYC is up to? Lately, it's all about acting and look. I blame Baz Luhrmann and his Broadway *Bohème* babes, but that's just me. I'm not saying "looks", I'm saying "look." We don't all have to develop eating disorders, inject our faces with poison and play with scalpels. However, the more I flip through that magazine, the more I see model spreads where the singers are posed to indicate a certain persona. It's all about creating that memorable visual impression that everyone takes home to Tower Records or their next casting meeting.

The trouble with strategizing auditions like a mad bat, is dealing with the fallout when things don't go our way. Well, kids, we can't win them all. It's easy enough to "sing your best piece" and if it doesn't work, you can tell yourself that it wasn't your fault that your best piece is twenty-three minutes long. If you walk in with a memorable look, then they'll remember you- even if they didn't like you. On the other hand, what's the point of busting a spleen to give the audition of a lifetime if the panel can't distinguish you from the eighty other sopranos who sang the same aria in almost the same outfit? Fading into the horde feels easy and safe, but the horde isn't being hired *en masse*. We can't win them all, but we can guarantee that we won't win any of them by refusing to take responsibility for marketing ourselves in that crucial seven-minute slot.

I've argued with singers about just throwing ourselves into every audition and hoping for the best, versus making deliberate choices. In the end, it comes down to what your goals are and setting the terms of your own success. If success means nailing Zerbinetta at every audition regardless of the end result, then that's what you do. If success means drifting along and trusting pure luck and (hopefully) a rare natural talent, then there you are. If success means getting the gig, then you take stock what gets a person hired and that's what you bring to the table. In the end, you're the one up there and it's your choice. Just bear in mind that whatever you do, be it singing that eight-minute aria or scheming the perfect audition package, you're still making a choice.

Personally, I make the choice to succeed. So despite mornings of fiendishly self-destructive musings over my morning meal of Gothie-O's and broken glass, I pull my fragmented sanity back together and behave like a sensible person. I coif my beautifully bleached hair (the agent said that my natural color is, and I quote "too goth" which is funny because I would have blamed my black lipstick, but I digress) and select a three-minute miracle aria that is all about the acting. Why the acting? Because at the last few auditions I've done, I was tipped-off that the only people being seriously considered were the ones who could act. So, I hold the high notes and serve up the ham and I get asked for that magical second aria. I sing my fuzzy wuzzy ickle heart out and act like I'm Meryl Streep lusting after yet another Oscar.

And then the opera companies call my agent to say that they want to hire me because they loved the hair. What'd I tell you about the look?

When's the last time ... you proofread your materials? Resumes and bios are fluid documents, always being changed and updated. It's easy to let typos slip in. Computer glitches can also be responsible for errors. Poor spelling, grammatical errors, and other typos make a terrible first impression, so make sure you check your materials each time you send them out!

CROWN YOURSELF KING OF THE MASS-MAILING JUNGLE

By Anna K. Cox-Havron

Mass mailings are an important tool of the singer trade, but one that few singers use as effectively as they might. Knowing when to send what to whom offers one set of challenges. Managing and tracking the mailings is another, and one which is key to most efficient use of your resources. If applications for YAPs and competitions, audition requests to opera companies and managers, follow-up letters, publicity mailings, postcards, season brochures, newsletters are circling you like snarling predators, now's the time to snap that whip. Back, Simba! Here comes the tranquilizer dart!

Using a simple log to track each step in your marketing communications saves you enormous time, stress and money. Mass mailing -- with its follow-ups -- is a repetitive, detail-oriented task. Discipline those details, and you're back at the top of the food chain.

With the help of a log, you know immediately who has already responded, and who hasn't. You know at a glance what to do next.

I learned to organize mass mailings from my work as a survey research analyst in the healthcare field. Two of the surveys I conducted were mail surveys of physicians: one was a national survey, and one was a state survey. It is probably about as easy to get a busy physician to respond to a mailing as it is a General Director of an opera company. The key to success? Set up records so you see your next step at a glance, and then follow up, follow up, follow up.

With surveys I tracked literally thousands of pieces of mail. We started our communications with introduction letters, followed by the survey packet itself a week later, and then we tracked nonrespondents with a series of carefully timed follow-up letters and phone calls. We had to get responses from hundreds of physicians in order to get a scientifically valid sample. We also had to know who had answered us already (because people quite naturally get annoyed by being contacted after they've already responded), and of course we needed to know who we still hadn't heard from. It works the same way for singers --- you send out a cover letter and your materials packet, and a week or so later you begin follow-up emails, faxes, and phone calls, also carefully timed and tracked to avoid annoying potential employers.

I tracked my mailings with a spreadsheet, but you could track yours with anything from a spiral notebook to a database. With a computerized log, you can sort and search through your communications log much quicker, but a paper log is still far better than none at all.

So what information do you need to know at a glance, to manage the progress of your marketing blitz?

You need to know three big-picture things:

- 1) who your marketing packets went to
- 2) what you sent out when
- 3) and finally, what was your result

Let's break this down into specifics -- how would you set up a log? First, some basics: picture a grid, like a spreadsheet or a check register. Across the top you have column titles for different kinds of information (names, addresses, etc.) Along the side of the grid are the rows, where you enter your data for each person on your mailing list -- who you're contacting, what you sent that person, and what the results were of your correspondence with that particular company or individual.

When you set up your columns, use one simple piece of information per column. Cramming in lots of details makes data entry, referral and information sorting far more difficult than it needs to be. It's better to have lots of very distinct, highly specific column titles than four or five vague ones. The more specific you are with your column titles, the less you have to think while you enter your data. The less you have to think about what

information you're entering as you enter it, the faster the job goes, and the easier it will be for you to read your log later. What's not to love?

Your first group of columns will track your contacts' data.

Make separate columns for each of the following lovely and talented pieces of information:

contact person's name
contact person's title
contact person's company or organization
mailing address
email address
phone number
fax
Responded?

For the column titled 'Responded?', enter 'Y' for yes or 'N' for no, so you can quickly tell whom you're still waiting to hear from.

Then, you'll want to track what you've sent out, when. Communications columns will help you there.

This next set of columns assumes that you have already planned out your campaign -- you've got a marketing packet, and you've decided on a follow-up strategy -- a series of communications (phone calls, emails, and/or letters) that you will send at specific intervals, if you get no response. Title your columns by what you're sending, and then in the space or cell, record the date this was done. (Recording the date gives you two pieces of vital information in one: first, that you completed the task, and second, it tells you how much time has elapsed since then, so that you can follow up as needed.)

Let's say you've decided you will send out a marketing packet, and then if you hear nothing after two weeks, you will send a polite follow-up email. Then three weeks later, if you still get no response, you might send a second email or a fax. A month after the second attempted contact, if there's still no response, you might follow up with a phone call.

Using this plan for your marketing and follow-up communications, you could title your columns like these:

Marketing packet
First follow-up email
Second follow-up email or fax
Final follow-up phone call

Under each of these columns, record the date you completed each action, for each of your contacts. It's always good to track dates, whenever you send or receive something --

many people file their correspondence by date, and this makes it easier to refer to something later ('I am responding to your email of June 15, 2005').

Finally, you'll want to track what the outcome was, for each company you contacted. For this, you'll set up results columns. Your column headings recording your results might resemble these:

Date of response
Results
Additional notes

To simplify data entry for your 'Results' column, use brief standardized summary phrases like these:

No interest
Not applicable (use for problems such as marketing packets returned because of wrong addresses, or the company no longer exists, etc.)
Contact later (use for when a company expresses interest in you, but has no immediate job offer)
Schedule audition, meeting, interview

Then you can follow that with a 'notes' column for specific details:

'They want to hear from me next season -- will be doing 'Magic Flute'
'General director has resigned -- research name of new director'

Also with your log, keep a copy of all the mass materials you send: your marketing packet, plus copies of all form follow-up letters or emails. That way you know exactly what went out, in case you or the companies you're targeting have questions about previous correspondence. You also can look back, season to season, and see which companies are responding to you and which aren't --- useful for identifying patterns and beginning to comprehend what you might need to change in order to attract the non-responding companies.

That's it! Keep track of that information, and you're in peaceful control, even if it means -- like my surveys -- that you're sending numerous letters to over a thousand people. Grrrrrrrr . . . Now who's king of the mass mailing jungle?

Anna K. Cox-Havron is a writer and professional organizer. She is the founder and managing director of The File Factor, LLC, which specializes in goal setting, time management, and office organization for artists and other professionals. She can be reached at AnnaK@thefilefactor.com.

NEWS

Get Well Soon! CJ Williamson, aka Carla Wood, editor-in-chief of *Classical Singer* Magazine, underwent surgery for a brain tumor just before Memorial Day. She is now

home recovering. A website detailing her progress can be seen at <http://announcing.us/carla/updates.php>. There is a guestbook where you can leave good wishes. You may also email her at cj@classicalsinger.com. Please join me, and classical singers all over the world, in sending thoughts, prayers, and good wishes to this wonderful woman and artist who has done so much for our industry and our profession.

CALENDAR AND AUDITIONS

JOB OPENING

Lawrence Conservatory of Music in Appleton, WI

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FACULTY POSITION IN VOICE - SEPTEMBER 2005

RESPONSIBILITIES: Studio teaching of voice and related activities; possible voice-related course work.

QUALIFICATIONS: Outstanding teacher and performer. Low Male Voice preferred; all voice types considered. Appropriate terminal degree or equivalent experience.

RANK AND SALARY: Non-tenure-track. Dependent upon qualifications and experience.

APPLICATIONS: Should include letter of application, curriculum vitae, copies of representative concert and opera programs, recent performance recording(s), four letters of reference, and academic transcripts.

CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC: Serving over 360 music majors (including 100 voice majors), the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music, founded in 1874, is a distinguished undergraduate program offering preparation for professional careers in music within the intellectual environment of a liberal arts college.

Consideration of candidates will begin June 18, 2005 and will continue until the position is filled. Applications and nominations should be directed to:

Kenneth Bozeman
Chair, Voice Search Committee
Conservatory of Music
Lawrence University
420 East College Avenue
P. O. Box 599
Appleton, WI 54912-0599
Telephone: (920) 832-6611

June 12 – August 13 SCHROON LAKE, NY

The Seagle Music Colony summer program for young artists. The season features numerous concerts as well as fully staged and costumed productions of *Most Happy Fella*, *Sid the Serpent*, *Don Giovanni*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Oklahoma*. Contact seaglecolony@aol.com or visit www.seaglecolony.com for details.

July 11 – 25 2005 ASTORIA, OR

The Business of Singing Workshops and Master Classes

Astoria Music Festival and Academy, Astoria, OR
Visit <http://www.astoriamusicfestival.com/aboutFest.php> for details.

September 15, 2005

Deadline for entering the ASCAP-Lehmann Foundation Song Composition Competition. Age limit 30. First Prize is a \$3,500 commission for a song cycle for voice and piano, publication by E.C. Schirmer of the completed work, and performances of the song cycle in three major American cities, including New York. Second Prize (\$1,000) and Third Prize (\$500) will be awarded to commission two new songs for voice and piano. Applicants must be US citizens, permanent residents of the US, or enrolled students with student visas. One original work per composer may be submitted.

Guidelines and application can be found at:

http://www.ascap.com/press/2004/lehmann_121704.html

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 world can’t give that serenity,’ he said. ‘The world can’t give us peace. We can only find it in our hearts.’

‘I hate that,’ I said.

‘I know. But the good news is that by the same token, the world can’t take it away.’”

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*