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## Technique for the Developing Dramatic Soprano

Amber James  
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# Technique for the Developing Dramatic Soprano

by

Amber James

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of “Arts and Letters”  
and the School of “Music”  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation was inspired by a Facebook post by David L. Jones regarding common pedagogical problems in the dramatic soprano *Fach*. I am a dramatic soprano, who has dealt with many of the technical problems listed in his post. David L. Jones is an internationally recognized teacher and coach and has worked with some of the most well-known professional dramatic sopranos. After considering these pedagogical challenges, it was decided the best course of action was to interview professional singers, teachers, and coaches in the dramatic soprano *Fach*. After conducting a state of research, it was found that there was not an overwhelming amount of research specifically related to the training of dramatic sopranos. The following document is meant to be a guide for voice professionals in navigating the pedagogical problems often found in the dramatic soprano *Fach*, as well as offering solutions to these technical problems.

Section I contains the introduction and topics include the method of research, credentials of each interviewee, types of dramatic sopranos, information related to the European *Fach* system, challenges in teaching dramatic sopranos, and specialized training considerations. Section II encompasses the main body of the paper specifically addressing pedagogical problems and solutions. Information concerning breathing, registration, and interpretation tools are addressed. Section III offers a brief conclusion with advice from professional singers from the past and present. The document contains three appendices, which include full transcriptions of the interviews, a performer's guide to music specifically aimed towards dramatic sopranos, and the IRB approval letter.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Maryann Kyle, chair of my committee, advisor, voice mentor, and constant encourager. It has been my honor to work with you during this degree and I am eternally grateful for your investment in my life. I would also like to thank Dr. Jay Dean for the opportunities to better my skills on the stage and in the office. I learned a wealth of information while working alongside you in an administrative capacity with Mississippi Opera, the Natchez Festival of Music, and as the artist liaison for Deborah Voigt. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Edward Hafer, Dr. Douglas Rust, Dr. Susan Ruggiero, and Dr. Jonathan Yarrington, for your encouragement and feedback during this process. I would like to extend a special thanks to each of my interviewees for their time and willingness to share their expertise. These experts include Deborah Voigt, Susan Bullock, Abigail Dyer, Johanna Meier, Marjorie Owens, Jane Eaglen, Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Christine Goerke, Rebecca Teem, Victoria Livengood, Sherman Lowe, David L. Jones, Richard Nechamkin, Michael Strauss, Ellen Rissinger, Arlene Shrut, and Josh Greene. Finally, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my mother, Rebecca James, for her endless hours of interview transcription and editing. I would not have been able to produce this document without your help!

## DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my loving family. Mom, you have always been my biggest cheerleader. You have inspired me to achieve my dreams and have shown your love and support throughout this entire process. Dad, you have always taught me that I could do anything I wanted to do. You have been there as an emotional and financial support through years of music lessons and my pursuit of singing professionally. Both of you have inspired me to be self-motivated and to seek God's will for my life no matter the circumstances. Matt, you have been the most supportive brother and you have always encouraged me to be the best I can be. Support from you and Megan here at the end of this journey is extremely appreciated.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the teachers, mentors, and friends who have directly benefited my journey. To Jean Pollard, my first piano teacher, for showing me the best way to grow my gifts as a young musician. To Carolyn Salter, my elementary, middle, and high school chorus teacher, for giving me opportunities to perform as a singer and pianist. To Dr. Melanie Rowell, my first college voice teacher, and her husband, Scott, for being the best friends and supporters anyone could ever dream of having. To Jane Dill, my college piano teacher, for giving me countless opportunities to grow and share my gifts with others. To Dr. Don Campbell, my college choral professor, who believed in me from the beginning and instilled in me a thirst for knowledge. To Dr. Gregory Broughton, my voice teacher at the University of Georgia, for presenting me with concepts to push my growth and challenge my spiritual development. And finally, to my current voice teacher, Victoria Livengood, for helping me reach my fullest potential with each and every lesson.

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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

### Personal Experience

This document was formed due to the author’s personal experience as a dramatic soprano and the wealth of technical and pedagogical problems encountered during vocal training. Dramatic singers often face different challenges than singers with lighter voices. Larger voices are predominantly trained to sing heavier operatic repertoire which often necessitates a longer time to grow and develop vocally. Although pedagogical approaches and teachings may disseminate the same information and vocal techniques across all styles and vocal types, unique demands are required of the dramatic singer when performing the music of composers such as Puccini, Verdi, Strauss, and Wagner on the operatic stage. Professional singers, vocal coaches, and seasoned voice teachers often invest time, research, and study into the challenges related to the training of the dramatic voice type. Compiling research from these singing and teaching professionals of the past and present, combining the research into organized, easy to digest sections, and presenting this document specifically referencing these challenges and offering solutions can be a beneficial reference that has not been easily accessible for young dramatic sopranos training for a successful career.

Clifton Ware, a singer, teacher, and recognized pedagogue, sums up the important factors for dramatic voice types and their teachers/mentors to refer to during the training process. He states:

“Dramatic voice types tend to develop more slowly, and often do not reach their vocal prime until their 30s, 40s, or even 50s, depending on such factors as health, career development, and technique. Dramatic voice types must be encouraged to remain patient in their studies, for their ultimate reward is that good dramatic voices

are always in great demand. Though large-voiced singers are often late-bloomers, they can look forward to a long career once their vocal skills are mastered.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement provides insight, encouragement, and a path of realistic expectations for the developing dramatic soprano.

In this dissertation, information pertinent to the training of dramatic sopranos will be presented in two major parts. First, types of dramatic sopranos will be defined as well as a presentation of *Fach* identifications and appropriate operatic roles within these categorizations. Knowledge and execution of vocal pedagogy is a crucial part of vocal training and development. Although all voice types grapple with a lot of the same issues, there are some specific areas where the pedagogical challenges differ for the dramatic soprano. Secondly, an in-depth focus on breath management, registration and resonance, and interpretation challenges within this *Fach* will be presented as well as references to practical solutions to overcome technical and pedagogical problems.

Common roles within the dramatic soprano *Fach* are discussed in a performer’s guide located in Appendix B. This may be helpful when navigating how to learn the repertoire. Composer information will be summarized as well as information about each opera’s composition, character information for each role, and helpful information regarding the singing and performing of the arias in each role. The operas and roles presented are meant to be a starting point for research and are not comprehensive of every possible appropriate role. Information within the dissertation and appendices is based primarily on interviews the author had with current and retired singers, teachers, and coaches with expertise in this *Fach*.

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1. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 191.

## Method of Research

The first step in the research process was to assemble the appropriate types of questions to propose to each interviewee. Most questions relate directly to the interviewee's expertise, professional experience, personal or observed pedagogical and technical challenges as well as helpful solutions, and advice on operatic arias for auditions and roles for the stage. After compiling the questions, identifying the experts to interview was the next step. Interviews were conducted in person, by phone, over email, or over Skype. A transcript of each interview is provided in Appendix A.

The next step involved creating lists of each question asked by the author and grouping the answers of each expert to compare for similarities and differences. Information related to the pedagogical and technical challenges with their solutions formed the basis of the pedagogy section. The performer's guide section in Appendix B was collected from the expert's opinion on appropriate repertoire for various levels of development. These results led to the consultation of respected pedagogical books in the vocal performance field related to identifying vocal challenges and offering practical solutions for the singer. In addition, the most recurring and relatable opera roles are highlighted in the performer's guide as a tool for further study. Additional scholarship from professional singers from the past was also consulted with the original interview questions in mind.

### *Singing Experts*

Deborah Voigt's professional opera career was launched when she was one of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition winners in 1985. Over the course of her career, she sang in the world's top opera houses in the dramatic soprano repertoire.

Currently, she is on the voice faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Her book, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-to-Earth Diva*, was released in 2015. She is perhaps best known for her portrayal of Ariadne (Strauss), Minnie (Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*), Brünnhilde (Metropolitan Opera Production, among others), and Wagner's Isolde.

Susan Bullock, a British soprano, began her work at the Royal Academy of Music in London, advancing as a chorister with the Glyndebourne Festival and eventually becoming part of the English National Opera.<sup>2</sup> Although her career began singing lighter repertoire such as Pamina and Gilda, she is currently singing roles from *The Ring Cycle*, the title role in *Elektra*, and the role of Isolde worldwide.

Abigail Dyer earned a Ph.D. in History and has been studying in the German operatic style for six years. In addition to covering roles such as Kundry in Germany, she has also served on the conducting and directing staff at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Komische Oper, and Berliner Staatsoper.

Johanna Meier is best known as the first American singer to portray the role of Isolde at Bayreuth. Although she is retired, her career spanned thirty-seven years. She sang with major orchestras worldwide and with many international opera houses such as New York City Opera and The Metropolitan Opera.<sup>3</sup> Ms. Meier also facilitated an intensive summer program for singers in her home state of South Dakota for many years.

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2. Susan Bullock, Skype interview by author, New York City, May 29, 2016.

3. Johanna Meier, phone interview by author, New York City, July 5, 2016.

Marjorie Owens recently debuted the role of Aida at the Metropolitan Opera. After graduating college, she participated in the young artist program with Houston Grand Opera and Chicago Lyric Opera.<sup>4</sup> After her young artist experience she moved to Dresden, Germany, signing a *Fest* contract for four years with the Semperoper. She is currently on the roster at the Metropolitan Opera and is performing all over the world. She has won many singing awards, including the Metropolitan Opera's National Council Auditions.

Jane Eaglen is currently on the voice faculty at the New England Conservatory of Music. Ms. Eaglen is best known for her portrayal of Wagner's heroines in addition to Bellini's *Norma* and Puccini's *Turandot*. Her full-time singing career spanned twenty-five years with engagements in the world's top opera houses. Although she predominantly teaches now, she continues to sing while training the next generation of singers.<sup>5</sup>

Rachel Willis-Sørensen is an American soprano who has been professionally singing for the past seven years. Her professional career began with her portrayal of Mozart roles, especially as the Countess, in most of the world's major opera houses.<sup>6</sup> She has also begun to sing a few Wagner heroines such as Eva and Elsa. Ms. Willis-Sørensen is on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera and maintains a full-time singing schedule all over the world.

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4. Marjorie Owens, Skype interview by author, New York City, July 7, 2016.

5. Jane Eaglen, phone interview by author, New York City, July 19, 2016.

6. Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Skype interview by author, New York City, July 21, 2016.



Christine Goerke is currently singing dramatic soprano repertoire all over the world. She will be portraying the role of Brünnhilde in the upcoming production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* at the Metropolitan Opera in 2019. In addition to a full-time singing schedule, she also leads the Miami Music Festival's Wagner Institute program for dramatic voices each summer.

Rebecca Teem is a dramatic soprano singing predominantly in Germany. She has covered many of the world's top dramatic sopranos at many of the top opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera. She was a regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 1999. Ms. Teem recently sang the title role in *Elektra* in Stuttgart and Essen as well as Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung* in Leipzig.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Teaching Experts*

Victoria Livengood is best known for the role of Carmen at the Metropolitan Opera. Her career was launched after she was a winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 1985. She continues to perform professionally all over the world while maintaining a full-time private teaching studio. Although she teaches all voice types, Ms. Livengood primarily teaches dramatic sopranos and is the author's current teacher.

Sherman Lowe began his career as a professional singer but changed direction after suffering with acid reflux. He applied and was granted a Fulbright scholarship to study and research different ways of teaching in Venice.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Lowe is still teaching in Venice and is the teacher of several dramatic sopranos including Susan Bullock.

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7. Rebecca Teem, in person interview by author, New York City, August 14, 2016.

8. Sherman Lowe, Skype interview by author, New York City, June 28, 2016.

David L. Jones is one of the premier vocal instructors based in New York City. Much of his teaching style is based on his summer of study with Allan Lindquest. As a singer, Mr. Jones also studied with Evelyn Reynolds.<sup>9</sup> Mr. Jones has taught famous voices such as Deborah Voigt and recently released a book entitled *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools*. He continues to teach privately, conducts masterclasses all over the world, and offers a teaching training program in New York City.

#### *Coaching Experts*

Richard Nechamkin is the musical director of the New York Opera Forum. This group of singers rehearse and perform concert versions of full operas within the community. As a conducting student, Mr. Nechamkin worked with Anton Coppola, Sixten Ehrling, and Pierre Boulez.<sup>10</sup> He also works as coach and pianist with Mississippi Opera and the Natchez Festival of Music.

Michael Strauss is on the faculty at the New England Conservatory of Music and the Boston Conservatory of Music. Mr. Strauss began his career as a concert pianist, eventually moving into opera as a répétiteur.<sup>11</sup> In addition to his work at the two conservatories, he freelances as a coach and is on the faculty of the International Performing Arts Institute, a summer program in Germany.

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9. David L. Jones, phone interview by author, New York City, August 27, 2016.

10. Richard Nechamkin, in person interview by author, New York City, June 8, 2016.

11. Michael Strauss, phone interview by author, New York City, June 21, 2016.

Ellen Rissinger is currently on the coaching staff at the Semperoper in Dresden, Germany. In addition to her many years in Dresden, Ms. Rissinger has worked with other programs such as Glimmerglass and with singers such as Anna Netrebko and Renée Fleming.<sup>12</sup> Her experience in Dresden has afforded her the opportunity to work heavily in the Germanic repertoire and with dramatic singers.

Arlene Shrut is a vocal coach who formerly taught at the Manhattan School of Music and Juilliard. Ms. Shrut has personally worked as a private coach and has been promoting a project related to pianists collaborating with singers with the Atlantic Music Festival.<sup>13</sup> Although most of her work has been freelance, she coached Wagner's *Ring Cycle* with Arizona Opera.

Josh Greene is currently a coach, prompter, and assistant conductor at the Metropolitan Opera. In addition to his work with professional singers at the Met, he also coaches privately and teaches at the Mannes School of Music in New York City. Specific productions Mr. Greene has contributed to at the Met include *Tristan und Isolde*, *Meistersinger*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Aida*, and *Turandot*.<sup>14</sup>

### Types of Dramatic Sopranos

The New Grove Dictionary of Opera defines a dramatic soprano as: "A type of soprano voice. The term admits a wide variety of repertory and voice type. Any claimant to it must possess a powerful voice and a style capable of energetic emphasis..."<sup>15</sup>

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12. Ellen Rissinger, Skype interview by author, New York City, June 29, 2016.

13. Arlene Shrut, in person interview, New York City, July 27, 2016.

14. Josh Greene, in person interview by author, New York City, August 27, 2016.

15. J.B. Steane, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Vol. 1. ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan Press Limited, 1992),

Renown pedagogue William Vennard asserted that the “dramatic soprano is either a spinto who is now able to ‘push’ relentlessly, or a mezzo who has learned to carry her full production (or nearly so) clear to the top of the soprano range.”<sup>16</sup> Regardless, a dramatic soprano must possess a powerful voice able to soar over a large orchestra.

Verdi and Wagner are two composers from the Italian and German styles that represent operatic roles for the dramatic soprano. Verdi began composing for the lighter lyric soprano voice in his early years but as his style developed, a more dramatic voice was often required to project over his orchestra and to embody the dramatic characters in later Verdi operas. The qualities necessary for a Verdi soprano include lyricism with dramatic qualities and a darker timbre with the use of a resonant, trumpet-like sound that allows a lyric tone to be heard over thick orchestration. The term *lirico spinto*, is often applied to voices with a capacity for power and incisiveness at dramatic climaxes, and/or a dramatic soprano when identifying Verdi sopranos. The qualities of a Wagnerian soprano include the ability of the voice to be projected over the orchestra and to maintain that projection for long periods of time, often three or more hours, an understanding of Wagner’s complex music, and a voice that is evenly balanced through all registers.

There are two types of dramatic sopranos as given by the well-known teacher and coach of larger voices, David L. Jones. The first type is one who possesses an easy, spinning top voice often accessing coloratura range. Christine Goerke wrote about how she fit into this category when she was in her 20s. Her advice was to delve into the dramatic coloratura literature if this easy top voice was accessible. Jones defines the other

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16. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*. rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 79.

type of dramatic soprano as one who has a lower, fuller sound with a thick middle voice. A good example of this is Nina Stimm, another famous dramatic soprano, who is singing Wagner repertoire all over the world. The Wagnerian and Straussian repertoire lends itself well to this second type of dramatic soprano.

These two classifications are very helpful when the student is beginning their vocal study in trying to identify the appropriate repertoire to sing. Very few people will be singing the Wagner repertoire at age nineteen like a young Jane Eaglen. But, it is very important to remember that even though this is a small *Fach* in terms of singers who possess the vocal abilities needed to perform the heavier literature, every person is different. This discussion is designed to provide vocal professionals and aspiring singers with more insight to start or continue the journey towards realizing full vocal potential in the dramatic soprano repertory.

### The *Fach* System

There is a German *Fach* system<sup>17</sup> for all voice types that provides guidance into opera roles typically sung by each vocal category. For a developing dramatic soprano, it is important to study these lists and use them as guides. Then, take the roles and their arias and listen with a critical ear to see if the role would be appropriate for the current level of development. Beginning this process with a vocal professional familiar with the repertoire is most helpful.

In the dramatic soprano category, there are three different recognized types of dramatic sopranos. The first, *Jugendlich-dramatischer Sopran*, contains the lightest

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17. J.B. Steane, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. vol. 2., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan Press Limited, 1992), 102-3.

repertoire for the dramatic soprano, often covering the *spinto* voice classification as well. Typical *spinto* voices are used in Verdi, Puccini, and other verismo composer's operas.<sup>18</sup> This is the best place to start researching, especially if the student is in their 20s. The second, *Dramatischer Sopran*, falls between the lightest and heaviest repertoire. This repertoire is appropriate for sopranos in their late 20s and early 30s who have a solid vocal technique. The third, *Hochdramatischer Sopran*, contains the heaviest and highest literature. The roles in this last category will probably not be part of a dramatic soprano's repertoire until she is in her late 30s to early 40s. There is an extensive list of composers, operas, and roles for each of these three *Fach* categories printed in an Appendix in *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*.<sup>19</sup> The list is not all-inclusive but is derived by Rudolf Kloiber and can serve as a valuable resource. There is also a list of audition arias in a separate appendix derived from this same source that provides a practical beginning point of study and preparation for future auditions.<sup>20</sup>

Pre-determined physiological factors play a primary role in correct *Fach* identification. Richard Miller said, "Subtle differences in categories of the soprano voice are based on variations in physiognomy, laryngeal size, shape of the resonator tract, points in the musical scale where register events occur, and personal imaging."<sup>21</sup> G. B. Lamperti has been quoted as saying, "One of the most eminent dramatic sopranos 'found

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18. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

19. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010).

20. *Ibid.*

21. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

herself’ only after singing light roles for twenty years.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, William Vennard said, “It is foolhardy – and a little ridiculous – for a young singer to classify himself as ‘dramatic.’”<sup>23</sup> This can be interpreted as an admonishment to refrain from singing heavy repertoire too early in the vocal development. To further the point, Miller says, “Brünnhilde and Zerlina are separated from each other by a wide gulf of laryngeal and vocal-tract construction...the category (Fach) of each female voice is largely determined by the physiology of the instrument itself, the location of voice-register demarcations, and adherence to specific tonal concepts.”<sup>24</sup> With these parameters, it is easily deduced that a singer’s voice type is a direct connection to individual characteristics possessed from birth.

Identifying the appropriate *Fach* is a large part of future success as a performer. The word *Fach* literally means “specialty or category.”<sup>25</sup> In the world of opera, it can mean several different things. In Europe, it is “a system used by European opera houses to hire singers and cast their operas, and by opera singers to ensure the longevity of their careers.”<sup>26</sup> Opera companies use this system to ensure they have the correct number and type of singers for each season.

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22. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer’s Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 11.

23. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 79.

24. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

25. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer’s Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 2.

26. *Ibid.*, xvii.

There are several elements in defining *Fach*. They include vocal quality, range, size, timbre, physical build, age and experience, desire, and frequency of performance.<sup>27</sup> Common technical capabilities across all *Fachs* include, “Proficient breath management, freedom of articulation, balanced resonance, and skillful registration...”<sup>28</sup> Using voice size as an excuse for sloppy technique will not advance any career. Recognizing that technical ability should be at the highest standard is imperative and should be comparable to every other voice type.

Every voice has its own individual sound. If the quality of the voice is lighter and enjoys coloratura, then the singer should prepare repertoire with those characteristics. The heavier voices tend to have a darker quality and enjoy long, sustained passages. Range is also very important as every role within a *Fach* category is not created equal. The student should know where the voice likes to sit and work with a teacher or coach to develop the areas of the voice that are weaker. As each singer develops over time, range may change. The size of the voice can also change once better technique is utilized or after major body changes such as pregnancy or significant weight changes. In the dramatic soprano *Fach* categories, voice size plays a large role in being successful due to projecting over a larger orchestra. Regarding voice size, Richard Miller states:

“Research on laryngeal structure and function supports the supposition that the range and timbre of an individual voice is in large part determined by the construction of the larynx itself (particularly the length and thickness of the vibrating vocal folds [vocal cords]), by the relationship of the larynx to adjacent structures, and by the length and configuration of the vocal tract.”<sup>29</sup>

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27. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 9.

28. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

29. *Ibid.*, 15.



The body's physical build also plays a large part in *Fach* identification since dramatic sopranos tend to be bigger boned, heavier, possibly taller, and possess a full facial bone structure.

As singers become older and gain more experience, preparation for the heavier repertoire will become easier. Every singer has a desire to sing their favorite arias and composers. Due to the difficulty of the music and the need for stamina, aspiring dramatic sopranos should have a deep desire to perform this repertoire. One should look at how frequently the roles may be performed in the United States and abroad and use that information as a guide to determine which *Fach* category will be most successful for one's individual voice and abilities. Henderson states, "The manner of singing Mozart is not the manner of singing Puccini, nor will the manner suitable for Donizetti be found appropriate to the lyric dramas of Wagner."<sup>30</sup>

Let's look at each of these *Fach* categories within the dramatic soprano range with more specificity. The *Jugendlich-dramatischer sopran* "refers to a young-looking dramatic soprano with a powerful and beautiful voice capable of long lyric phrases but of a greater volume capability than the lyric soprano."<sup>31</sup> The range is from middle C (C4) rising two octaves to C6. This voice must possess great power. Examples of roles within this category are Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, Desdemona in *Otello*, Magda in *The Consul*,

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30. W.J. Henderson, *The Art of Singing* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1938), 130.

31. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 23.

and Giorgetta in *Il Tabarro*. Possessing great dramatic skill and acting abilities are required in addition to solid vocal technique.

The *Dramatischer Sopran* must have “a powerful, brilliant voice, physically and vocally imposing on stage.”<sup>32</sup> The range extends from G3 up to C6. Her voice must be able to be heard over a larger, louder orchestra and she must possess a great amount of stamina for her singing and acting. Examples of roles within this category are Leonore in *Fidelio*, Minnie in *La fanciulla del West*, Turandot, Aida, and Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*.

The *Hochdramatischer Sopran* is defined as “The most powerful and mature of soprano voices, with a smooth line, beautiful color, effortless volume, and endless staying power.”<sup>33</sup> The range is also the same as the *Dramatischer Sopran* but typically the role sits higher in tessitura. Examples of roles within this last category are Elektra, Venus in *Tannhäuser*, Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*, and Brünnhilde in the last three operas of *The Ring Cycle*. This category is not considered appropriate for young, developing dramatics but are suitable once a career has been firmly established and the singer consistently demonstrates advanced vocal technique.

Another *Fach* category that may interest the developing dramatic soprano is the *Zwischenfachstimme*. This vocal category requires “a bright, metallic voice with the power to portray dramatic characters.”<sup>34</sup> These roles usually sit lower in the range which typically encompasses A3 up to a B5. These roles usually demand great actresses first

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32. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 24.

33. *Ibid.*, 25.

34. *Ibid.*, 24.

with great singing coming in second. Examples of roles in this category include Carmen, Mélisande in Debussy's *Pelleas et Mélisande*, and Margert in Richard Strauss's *Feuersnot*. When performing these roles, it is important not to darken the voice artificially to sound more like a natural mezzo soprano. Astrid Varnay, one of the world's leading dramatic sopranos in the mid to late twentieth century, advises singing with your natural voice regardless of the part.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to remember that every role within the singer's most comfortable *Fach* category will not be a perfect fit vocally and dramatically. The student must choose what fits the voice on a role by role basis. In preparing for a career, the student may learn roles in the most comfortable *Fach* first then explore one *Fach* lighter and one *Fach* heavier. This is important for the European system in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, as one may be required to cover all three categories within a contract.<sup>36</sup>

### Challenges in Teaching Dramatic Sopranos

Finding the right teacher to support the voice to its fullest potential is imperative to vocal success. Connecting with a teacher familiar with the European *Fach* system provides an invaluable resource for *Fach* identification and proposed directions for vocal growth. William Vennard comments that a "versatile teacher tries as many approaches as possible, until he discovers the one that works with each pupil. The important thing is that all the essentials of singing are so interrelated that if a student can be led into a

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35. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 244.

36. Pearl Yeadon McGinnis, *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*, ed. Marith McGinnis Willis (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 13.

profound knowledge of any one phrase of his art, he will learn the others along with it.”<sup>37</sup>

Additional factors such as the teacher’s singing experience, personality traits, and a healthy atmosphere promoting growth for the whole singer are important in the teacher/student dynamic.

The dramatic soprano might expect that their training will not mirror lighter voice types. Richard Miller contends that an “important aspect of voice training is to recognize what are reasonable expectations at appropriate developmental stages for each category. The potential dramatic soprano should not be expected to accomplish tasks suited to her soubrette counterpart of the same chronological age.”<sup>38</sup> Clifton Ware gave a detailed account regarding teaching dramatic voices. He said:

“Dramatic voice types are fairly evident by the time a student reaches the age of 21 or 22, or possibly earlier. Because their instruments are rather unwieldy and often fail to respond readily to technical instruction, experience has taught voice teachers to be patient in working with such large-voiced singers. For example, register transitions may shift abruptly when a dramatic female voice moves between chest and head registers. Range may also be limited, especially on the top due to insufficient head voice exploration. Agility and flexibility may be difficult to achieve, as when singing fast coloratura. Because of these technical considerations, many teachers will play it safe by selecting repertoire suitable for the singer’s current technical ability. While this course of action is pedagogically sound, teachers must also persist with rigorous exploration of the voice’s potential by having the student sing a variety of vocal exercises daily that include range-extension, agility, sostenuto, and dynamics.”<sup>39</sup>

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37. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*. rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 191.

38. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5-6.

39. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 193.

## Specialized Training

One of the most important questions posed to the group of interviewees was whether or not dramatic sopranos require specialized training. Some said yes and others no, all giving reasons for their opinion. Of those interviewees who answered yes to specialized training, their reasons are as follows. One of the misconceptions surrounding dramatic soprano training is that they are expected to sing loudly. Instead, it is important to train the student to sing with color.<sup>40</sup> There also needs to be more focus on body function and learning how to hold back air pressure.<sup>41</sup> The physical resistance to the air is higher than with lighter *Fachs*.<sup>42</sup> Every voice is different but dramatic sopranos need to have more stamina.<sup>43</sup> In summary, slight individual adjustments need to be made on a case by case basis, realizing that excessive *Fach* comparisons can be futile since each voice is unique.

Most of the interviewees answered no to specialized training. An important point is that all voices need the same basic training, but dramatic voices need more stability and strength.<sup>44</sup> The author's current teacher, Victoria Livengood, says that she teaches the same way with all students although she does have to address specific issues with dramatic voices.<sup>45</sup> Training in the *bel canto* style is imperative from the very beginning of

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40. Susan Bullock, Skype interview by author, New York City, May 29, 2016.

41. David Jones, phone interview by author, New York City, August 27, 2016.

42. Sherman Lowe, Skype interview by author, Waxhaw, NC, June 28, 2016.

43. Rebecca Teem, interview by author, New York City, August 14, 2016.

44. Abigail Dyer, interview by author, New York City, June 15, 2016.

45. Victoria Livengood, interview by author, Mint Hill, NC, June 27, 2016.

the student's study. Holding back the voice or singing heavier repertoire before the voice is developed can cause significant damage.<sup>46</sup> Starting with art song may be a much better basis for a stable technique at the beginning of study. Dramatic sopranos tend to be marginalized in their personal lives because of how they look and the size of their instrument. They need to find teachers who will cherish them, so they feel confident and comfortable in their ability to express music freely.<sup>47</sup> It is important to look at the vocal progressions of famous dramatic sopranos as a basis for a singer's own journey.<sup>48</sup>

Healthy vocal technique is imperative for every voice type. The style and color of voice may be unique, but the basic function of solid vocal technique is the same. In Richard Miller's opinion, the range of soprano voices is extensive; therefore, not all soprano voices should be trained in the same pedagogical format.<sup>49</sup> Deborah Voigt personally feels it is important to study with a dramatic voice.<sup>50</sup> Others may feel this is not necessary, especially at the beginning of one's training. Christine Goerke believes that each type of soprano voice requires specialized training specific to their individual needs.<sup>51</sup> Knowing the voice and choosing repertoire and mentors that foster a sense of healthy vocal production aids the singer in starting a grounded, successful career.

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46. Michael Strauss, phone interview by author, New York City, June 21, 2016.

47. Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Skype interview by author, New York City, July 21, 2016.

48. Deborah Voigt, phone interview by author, New York City, May 24, 2016.

49. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

50. Deborah Voigt, phone interview by author, New York City, May 24, 2016.

51. Christine Goerke, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.

## CHAPTER II - PEDAGOGY

Many books and articles have been written on the subject of vocal pedagogy. For the purposes of this document, this section on vocal pedagogy is not meant to be an exhaustive, comprehensive retelling of the research and work already completed in this field. Instead, pedagogical problems most often found within the dramatic soprano voice type will be highlighted. These pedagogical challenges will be listed and defined with relevant scientific research providing solutions as well as imagery concepts catering to every learning style. Popular exercises will be referenced as a learning tool for the student and as a guide for the teacher. Each specific section discussed in this pedagogical section were inspired by the author's interviews with the aforementioned professionals. For additional in-depth information, please refer to the works cited for a list of reputable pedagogy books written by experts in the field.

The category of soprano as it pertains to pedagogy is extremely diverse and varied. Richard Miller says, "...care must be taken not to subject them all to rigid pedagogic processes and identical performance literatures."<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Miller said, "Universal measures apply to each soprano voice, but the diversity of instruments within the general soprano category requires variations in pedagogic application."<sup>53</sup> While certain aspects of vocal pedagogy are factual processes inherent in every voice, a specific study of pedagogical practices related to dramatic voices will be presented here. This

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52. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

53. *Ibid.*, 3.

information has been drawn from respected pedagogy books within the voice profession as well as the expertise offered by the professional interviewees specific to this topic.

Regarding the training of dramatic voices, Martial Singher said, "...the more dramatic the singing, the more it should rely on coordination and beauty. It should also allow the singer to be in good voice the next morning."<sup>54</sup> As a young singer with a larger voice, technical vocal problems are most always expected during development. David L. Jones has a strong opinion on how to approach younger, large voices. In his new book he said:

"While I do not believe in allowing younger singers to produce sound with a big, over-produced type of tonal production, every young, large-voiced singer must be allowed to engage the healthy fullness of his/her instrument with full body connection. The larger-voiced singer who is trying desperately to 'lighten up the voice' often suffers a squeeze of the laryngeal muscles resulting from a high larynx position. Use of the Italian *appoggio* can assist in helping singers achieve a slightly lower larynx, as it controls the sub-glottic breath pressure. The laryngeal tilt is of major importance in helping the larger-voiced singer to achieve complete pharyngeal vowel space."<sup>55</sup>

Jones continues to identify pitfalls for larger-voiced singers. He said:

"Many larger-voiced singers can sound impressive (especially in a smaller room) by employing a large, driven sound. But, as stated earlier, the voices of singers who adopt a pushed production – usually pushing the sound out of the mouth rather than spinning it into the soft palate – do not carry in the theater. I cannot stress this enough. In addition, these singers compromise their long-range vocal health and longevity. When such a singer then begins to develop vocal problems, they usually resort to pushing even more breath pressure, the opposite of what is needed to solve the problem."<sup>56</sup>

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54. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 263.

55. David L. Jones *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 241.

56. *Ibid.*, 216.



Therefore, it is difficult to engage completely in moments of intense artistry on the stage if the singer possesses a technical deficiency in the vocal production.

### Artistry

Beginning with artistic intent will keep the learning process fun and encouraging as vocal technique continues to be built. Clifton Ware states that, “Getting the most out of life – and one’s voice – begins with a serious commitment to maintaining a healthy mind and body.”<sup>57</sup> Richard Miller said, “To acquire the ability to simulate the entire gamut of human emotions, which far exceeds what any individual can ever expect to personally encounter, is to successfully ply one’s craft to its fullest artistic realization.”<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Ware suggests that “The singer whose artistic intent is to stir people’s emotions learns that being well-grounded in all aspects of language opens up a more extensive, colorful palette of expressive means.”<sup>59</sup> Identifying the physiological factors in the body such as laryngeal position, jaw and tongue involvement, and successfully operating the breath mechanism aid in the overall development of a singer’s contribution to artistry.

### Laryngeal Position

A thorough knowledge of the anatomy of the larynx and its framework is important while navigating all the aspects of building vocal technique. William Vennard maintains that, “A sound that passes through a tense throat is different from one that

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57. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 37.

58. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159.

59. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 154.

comes from a relaxed throat.”<sup>60</sup> In Scott McCoy’s opinion, “the ideal laryngeal singing posture is one that allows the larynx to remain at or very slightly below its natural resting place.”<sup>61</sup> If an elevated larynx is a problem, there “are three ways of lowering ‘naturally’ a larynx that is pulled under the jaw. With inhalation, with yawning, and after swallowing, the larynx descends by reflex action.”<sup>62</sup> On the opposite side of the spectrum is a depressed larynx. “The alternative to the depressed larynx is by no means a high laryngeal position. Slight laryngeal descent with initial inspiration for singing is normal.”<sup>63</sup> Sustaining a stable but free larynx is imperative for successful singing.

“Very few – if indeed any – opera singers are able to produce their best sounds with the larynx held in an elevated position...Optimal singing...requires a high soft palate accompanied by a low laryngeal position (not depressed, but simply allowed to remain at or a little below its normal resting place). This means that the plethora of muscles that can elevate the larynx must be taught to relax during phonation.”<sup>64</sup>

A diagram of the anatomy of the larynx and the laryngeal framework is available in Scott McCoy’s pedagogy book.<sup>65</sup>

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60. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 101.

61. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 122.

62. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, Rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 109.

63. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 153.

64. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 119.

65. *Ibid.*, 107-8.

## Jaw and Tongue

The jaw and the tongue are two of the largest manipulative culprits for singers of all voice types. Many young singers use the tongue and jaw to “pitch” and/or control how the tone sounds. Lindsey Christiansen said that it is not the tongue or jaw’s job to act as a support for the voice.<sup>66</sup> Usually the behavior of one directs what the other one is doing. William Vennard points out that “A good reason for dropping the jaw as far as possible is that this pulls the tongue farther out of the pharynx, increasing its size and at the same time improving the megaphone shape of the buccal cavity.”<sup>67</sup> McCoy describes this action anatomically by stating:

“The hyoid bone also is the attachment point for the base of the tongue, several muscles of the jaw, and several muscles that are important for swallowing. Unfortunately, this situation can lead to technical problems for singers. Many structures important in singing share attachments to the hyoid bone; improper postures and tensions therefore easily are transferred from one location to another. This is particularly true of jaw and tongue tensions, which are passed directly down to the larynx.”<sup>68</sup>

David L. Jones’ book contains exercises teaching tongue and jaw independence. The first exercise requires the Italian syllables *da me ni po tu*. Jones says to “Rest the fingertips on the chin during this exercise to discourage the jaw from moving during pronunciation. Pronounce slowly at first, and allow the jaw to only move with minimum

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66. Elizabeth Blades-Zeller, *A Spectrum of Voices: Prominent American Voice Teachers Discuss the Teaching of Singing* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002), 83.

67. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 118.

68. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 108.

motion. Then gradually increase the speed of pronunciation, keeping the motion of the tongue separate from any jaw motion.”<sup>69</sup>

Richard Miller also offers several solutions for a shaking jaw and tongue. Miller advises the student to look “straight ahead, clasp the hands well forward on the top of the head, being certain that the head is neither elevated nor lowered, and that the chin and head do not bob up and down with changing pitch; sing passages from the literature where shaking has occurred.”<sup>70</sup> In addition, a diagram of articulator interconnections is found in Scott McCoy’s book and can be helpful from an anatomical perspective when working towards tongue and jaw independence.<sup>71</sup>

### *Jaw*

It is a common error to overextend the jaw, especially when singing high notes. Clifton Ware points out that “The correct way to completely open the mouth when singing high notes is to relax the muscles that raise the mandible, and allow the jaw to swing down on its hinge at the *condoyle* (the point where it intersects with the skull slightly forward of the ears.)”<sup>72</sup> A diagram of this action can be found in Ware’s book.<sup>73</sup> Also, using the jaw to form vowels is a common mistake, directly affecting the lips to

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69. David L. Jones *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 64.

70. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 100.

71. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 164-5.

72. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 146.

73. *Ibid.*, 147.

where they will cover the teeth.<sup>74</sup> Miller offers additional solutions for a tight jaw that include: a gentle, prolonged chewing motion; continued movement while humming; applying movement to short phrases in a comfortable part of the voice; and gradually increasing the phrase length.<sup>75</sup> David L. Jones also offers exercises for the jaw and open throat. Jones said, “Cradle the jaw with both hands, allowing it to fall into your hands. When you have totally relaxed it, sing a five-tone scale using the Italian syllables da me ni po tu. Monitor the jaw motion, making sure that it is down and back.”<sup>76</sup>

### *Tongue*

Tongue tension is one of the most common technical problems encountered by singers. “Tensions in the tongue can easily be transferred to the larynx. Recall that the tongue is attached to the hyoid bone, from which the larynx is suspended.”<sup>77</sup> The tongue is “a very large muscle which, by the nature of its strategic position and function, has a significant influence on the shape and size of the vocal tract.”<sup>78</sup> McCoy advises that, “For optimal efficiency in phonation – both speaking and singing – all the tongue muscles must be allowed to function with as little tension as possible. The accuracy of a vowel or

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74. Douglas Stanley, *The Science of Voice*, 4th ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1948), 70.

75. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 88.

76. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 66.

77. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 104.

78. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 144.

consonant relies on *where* the tongue is placed, not how firmly it is held in position.”<sup>79</sup>

Lilli Lehmann, a world renowned singer and teacher from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, suggests using a mirror to observe the movement of the tongue while singing; in addition, it is beneficial to observe all visible vocal organs in the mirror, noticing facial expressions, tongue position, mouth position, and lip movement.<sup>80</sup>

Lehmann specifies that the tongue must “lie very high, since otherwise its mass, when it lies flat, presses against the larynx and produces pinches or otherwise disagreeable tones.”<sup>81</sup> Lehmann continues to expound by saying:

“The back of the tongue must stand high and free from the throat, ready for any movement. *A furrow*<sup>82</sup> *must be formed in the tongue*, which is least prominent in the lowest tones, and in direct head tones may even completely disappear. As soon as the furrow in the tongue shows itself, the mass of the tongue is kept away from the throat since the sides are raised. Then the tone must sound right. Still there are singers whose tongues lie very well without a furrow.”<sup>83</sup>

Richard Miller offers practical solutions to tongue tension. He suggests that singers allow the apex of the tongue to move over the bottom inner teeth while speaking or singing through various vowels, eventually continuing the tone while ceasing the movement and maintaining the freedom.<sup>84</sup> Correct tongue positioning happens naturally

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79. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 159.

80. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 48.

81. *Ibid.*, 47.

82. A furrow may be defined as a narrow groove. It may also appear as a slight valley between the elevated sides of the tongue.

83. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 27.

84. Richard Miller. *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 102-

after the consonants v, f, b, p, k, g, s, and z.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, pair these consonants with various vowels in vocal warm ups to feel the correct tongue position. Miller states, “Allowing the lips, jaw, and tongue to follow patterns of spoken enunciation will cure most problems of tongue tension. Speak a phrase while retaining its rhythmic values; then sing it on a single pitch in lower-middle range with the same patterns of phonetic articulation as occur in speech.”<sup>86</sup>

### Breathing

One of the most important tenants of vocal study is correct inhalation of the breath, breath support, and posture. Learning how to breathe correctly to support the voice is paramount to overall successful development. All voice types should be completely engaged with the lower body in order to successfully sing operatic repertoire. But, dramatic voices may take breath expansion and support to a whole new level in order to support the larger voice. David L. Jones said,

“As the voice matures, the singer is tempted to sing loudly, rather than continuing to exercise the small part of the voice with an open acoustical space, and with correct body connection. Birgit Nilsson once said at a master class in New York, ‘I get my big relaxed sound from my small, body-connected, free sound.’”<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, outlining specific parameters encouraging free, connected sound to the body is the first step in learning breath management for singing.

### *Breath Management*

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85. Richard Miller. *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96.

86. *Ibid.*, 102.

87. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 100.

William Vennard summarizes the process of inhalation and exhalation as follows: “Let inhalation be quick and intentional – studied – and exhalation be slow and subconscious – unstudied...I sometimes say inhaling is like inflating a doughnut-shaped rubber cushion, and sitting on it is the secret of breath control.”<sup>88</sup> Over-breathing is unnecessary and counterproductive to producing an even, flowing tone. G. B. Lamperti said: “When you breathe only to satisfy the demand of oxygen throughout the lungs energetically, you are breathing as a singer.”<sup>89</sup> Lamperti continues the same thought by saying, “Breathe to satisfy the lungs, not to overcrowd them.”<sup>90</sup> A false sense of maximum inhale expansion takes place high in the chest and over-expanding the inhale actually introduces tension in the muscles.<sup>91</sup> Although breathing lower in the ribs is an unfamiliar sensation giving the impression of less air,<sup>92</sup> consistent practice of correct inhalation can create new muscle memory.

David L. Jones identifies the breath support muscles as including the lower back muscles, the epigastric area “(the muscle mass directly below the front ribs), which stretches in an east-west direction,” and the lower abdominal muscles “which resist

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88. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*. rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 34.

89. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 85.

90. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

91. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 28.

92. *Ibid.*, 29.



upward and wide, not in or out.”<sup>93</sup> He goes on to say, “In addition, there must also be an elongation of the rib cage while sustaining tone.”<sup>94</sup> William Vennard supports this concept by saying, “The sideward expansion of the ribs characterizes an important type of respiration: *costal* or rib breathing...breath control depends upon resisting the tendency to collapse the ribs as long as possible.”<sup>95</sup> The coordination of resistance to the flow of air and healthy vocal fold adduction is imperative. Richard Miller says, “To be skillful, a voice user must learn to maintain equilibrium between the mechanics of airflow regulation and vocal-fold resistance to the air in order to accomplish precise coordination between the two.”<sup>96</sup> Releasing the muscles in the back aids the singer in grounding the support system low in the body, promoting a free-floating laryngeal structure and insuring a greater possibility of freedom within the tone.

Regulation of resistance to the air flow constantly requires adjustment depending on the pitch. Miller said, “It takes more concentrated breath energy to sing in upper range than in lower range. With ascending pitch, gradual adjustment of the vocal folds for the elongation process, and the increase of vocal-fold resistance to airflow, occur. In a descending scale, it is sometimes difficult to regulate reduced levels of breath energy to match vocal-fold shortening.”<sup>97</sup> As stated earlier, dramatic singers often over-compress

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93. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 115-6.

94. Ibid.

95. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 28.

96. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37.

97. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.

the tone which produces too much heftiness in the sound. Jones says, “Individuals who use over-compression through pulling down on the ribs are more subject to loss of vocal function in a shorter time. This ‘pulled down’ motion of the rib cage creates a large, heavy sound, but the sound is weighted and muscular and vocal longevity is sacrificed.”<sup>98</sup>

One of the most useful tools for breath support is to engage *appoggio* technique. Miller defines *appoggio* as “a system for combining and balancing muscles and organs of the trunk and neck, controlling their relationships to the supraglottal resonators, so that no exaggerated function of any one of them upsets the whole.”<sup>99</sup> He expounds on this concept by stating that “no initial sensation of grabbing or holding the breath should be associated with singing.”<sup>100</sup> While singing, the region of the chest area must feel very relaxed. Pulling in the lower abdominal muscles as a method of breath support is counterproductive to using *appoggio*. The singer should feel a connection from the sternum to the pelvic floor.<sup>101</sup> By keeping the sternum lifted, the diaphragm ascends more slowly, allowing the process of *appoggio* to occur. The carriage of the ribs, which are attached to the sternum, stays lifted.<sup>102</sup> Breath expansion occurs in the umbilical region and is more noticeable on the sides of the torso.<sup>103</sup>

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98. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 54.

99. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 23.

100. *Ibid.*, 25.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*, 24.

103. *Ibid.*, 24-5.

William Vennard provides a few basic exercises to develop breath control. The first exercise allows the singer to develop a greater capacity within the body to house the breath. While counting to five, the singer will inhale slowly, hold the air while counting to ten, then exhale on a five count, using many repetitions and varying the length of time as greater breath capacity is accessed.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Vennard asserts:

“...any exercise that improves the physique will make for better singing. There is probably no other skill in which general fatigue or debility will show more plainly. Of course, pursuits that build the body but endanger the organs involved in singing must be foregone...Any book or article on calisthenics will furnish several technics of strengthening the abdominal muscles, and this is the foundation of breath control, indeed, of singing.”<sup>105</sup>

Pages of additional breath management exercises can be found in Richard Miller’s *Structure of Singing*.<sup>106</sup>

As mentioned before, one aspect of breathing that often is not taught enough is how to breathe into your back. This type of breathing is required for the success of dramatic singing in a healthy and easy vocal production. Vennard cautiously supports this type of breathing by asserting that “Enlarging the ribcage is obviously necessary, and ‘expanding the diaphragm’ is recognized by most teachers, but the real ‘secret of breath control’ (supposedly) is ‘breathing in the back.’”<sup>107</sup> The ribs extend all the way around into the back which allows for a full breath. Feeling the lower back release on inhale is

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104. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic* rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 35.

105. *Ibid.*

106. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 29-37.

107. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 32.

one way to stay fully connected to the body. Combining the many aspects of breath management lead directly into how the singer begins the phonation process.

### Onset

Onset can be defined as how one begins phonation. G. B. Lamperti said, “When your tone emerges from silence into sound without effort, focused yet free, with sufficient energy to release, or restrain, back of it, you are one of the greatest singers.”<sup>108</sup> There are three types of onset: glottal, aspirate, and balanced. The glottal attack, as it is often called, is made by breath pressure built underneath adducted vocal folds with a popping sound when the folds open. This produces a harsher sound and is not vocally healthy to use on a consistent basis, unless the singer uses a softer glottal approach. An aspirated onset allows the breath to flow through open vocal folds without phonation, as in an elongated “h” sound. Excessive use of an aspirated onset proves to be a waste of usable breath for singing. The overall most healthy choice to use on a regular basis is a balanced onset. The flow of air and the vibrating of the folds are coordinated to begin together, providing a balanced, supported tone.

Due to its sheer size and weight, larger voices may be more apt to scoop underneath the tone when attacking a pitch or beginning a phrase.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, mastering exercises to develop a balanced onset is imperative to keep the voice from presenting with a lot of added vocal weight. Richard Miller said, “Nothing in technical accomplishment in singing is more beneficial to the vocal instrument than the proper

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108. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 106.

109. Anthony Frisell, *The Soprano Voice* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Publishers, 1966), 75.

positioning of the vocal folds for the clean onset. Such prephonatory tuning of the laryngeal muscles in combination with the exact degree of subglottic pressure and airflow provides the basis for good singing.”<sup>110</sup> In addition, an appropriate amount of breath pressure is necessary for a clean, correct attack. Any tension added to the muscles in the throat will result in an inefficient attack and tone.<sup>111</sup>

One balanced onset exercise given by Miller requires the singer to “Repeat the spoken sequence ‘ha, ha, ha, ha, ha’ several times, slowly and deliberately as a phrase unit, lingering over the initial aspirated [h] of each syllable. It is possible to sense when breath passing over the vocal folds is followed by sound that results from vocal-fold approximation (that is, when actual tone commences).”<sup>112</sup> David L. Jones also suggests making “...several strong hissing sounds, bringing your attention to the slight secondary expansion of the body when the sound begins... This resistance is the function that assists in creating a perfect closure of the vocal folds. It is accomplished through controlled, flexible lower body resistance.”<sup>113</sup>

### Resonance

Accessing optimum resonance in singing is crucial for career longevity and maintaining beauty in the tone. Scott McCoy lists a practical definition for resonance

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110. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 7.

111. Douglas Stanley, *The Science of Voice*, 4th ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1948), 96.

112. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 5.

113. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 94.

taken directly from the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary: “*Resonance is the intensification and enriching of a musical tone by supplementary vibration.*”<sup>114</sup>

Regarding resonance and its practical application, Richard Miller specified that there “is not fixed resonance in the vocal instrument such as exists in most other musical instruments...A cardinal rule for the singing voice is that there is no one ideal position of the mouth or jaw. It is the vowel, the consonant, the tessitura, and the intensity level that determine the degree of mouth aperture (mandibular movement).”<sup>115</sup>

Placement and focus of the voice are often mischaracterized as resonance. Clifton Ware asserts that placement “describes the localization of sensations within an appropriately aligned vocal tract, while focus describes an efficiently produced vocal tone that maximizes vibrational sensations.”<sup>116</sup> Resonance takes place in the resonators of the vocal tract. A diagram of the free resonators can be found in Scott McCoy’s book.<sup>117</sup> To achieve resonance balancing, Miller suggests that the singer closes their lips, breathing “through the nose as though slowly inhaling a pleasant aroma; maintain a pleasant expression on the face without actually smiling. Keeping the same sense of openness, exhale on the exclamation ‘HM!’ slowly, while sustaining the sound. Be aware of the balance of sensation in nasal, buccal, and nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal cavities.”<sup>118</sup>

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114. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 26.

115. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 83.

116. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 150.

117. Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, Ohio: Inside View Press, 2012), 28.

118. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 62.

## Registration

Registration is one of the most important areas to develop in vocal training and directly showcases the level of technical expertise the singer has acquired. Manuel Garcia II defines registration as “a series of consecutive and homogeneous tones going from low to high, produced by the development of the same mechanical principle, and whose nature differs essentially from another series of tones, equally consecutive and homogeneous, produced by another mechanical principle.”<sup>119</sup> Clifton Ware clarifies by stating, “**Register** refers to homogeneous tone *qualities* produced by the same mechanical system, and the term **registration** refers to the *process* of using and combining the registers to achieve artistic singing.”<sup>120</sup> Deborah Voigt indicates that young dramatic voices usually present with a strong, full middle and low range with work needed at the top of the range.<sup>121</sup> Young dramatic sopranos are often mischaracterized as mezzo sopranos due to registration issues in the *passaggio* and difficulty connecting into the top voice. The unification of all three registers is of paramount importance to successful singing and correct *Fach* identification. Lilli Lehmann said:

“In the formation of the voice no ‘register’ should exist or be created; the voice must be made even throughout its entire range...the practised [*sic*] artist should have at his command all manner of different means of expression, that he may be able to use his single tones, according to the expression required, with widely diverse qualities of resonance.”<sup>122</sup>

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119. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 112.

120. *Ibid.*, 113.

121. Deborah Voigt, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-To-Earth Diva* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 71.

122. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 43.

To balance resonance, you must be able to achieve success and consistency throughout the entire range, which can be a difficult task for any voice type.<sup>123</sup> William Vennard stipulates that the “mezzo soprano or dramatic soprano sings in all three registers throughout a very wide range with considerable smoothness.”<sup>124</sup> Defining the different registers and how many exist for the singer has always been a topic of debate among vocal pedagogues. Lilli Lehmann said that although there are three distinct vocal registers (chest, middle, and head), it is the teacher and student’s responsibility to train the voice to move through all three registers as if it is one, not allowing the listener to perceive changes in the sound.<sup>125</sup> Richard Miller supports this assertion by saying, “There are no timbre demarcations in the scale of a good singer, unless introduced for coloristic purposes; the skillful singer appears to have but *one* register.”<sup>126</sup>

Miller establishes four parameters to manage breath and even registration. He listed: “1. the sternum remains at a comfortably elevated position throughout the breath cycle, 2. the ribcage is fully expanded, neither rising nor falling at inhalation or during the execution of the phrase, 3. the diaphragm remains as long as possible at its lowest position, and 4. the normal rate of lung recoil is retarded.”<sup>127</sup> Astrid Varnay gives an

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123. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 63.

124. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 73.

125. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 56.

126. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 150.

127. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 120.



exercise for resonance balancing in her book. She suggests beginning with simple scales on one pitch, then progressively adding another pitch until the singer has reached an octave.<sup>128</sup> She continues by saying to go through all five main vowel sounds on every pitch, then move the scale up and down the range. Lilli Lehmann provides an excellent summary for this difficult topic. She said:

“Different ranges exist in the voices of almost all singers, but they ought not to be heard, ought not, indeed, to exist. Everything should be sung with a mixed voice in such a way that no tone is forced at the expense of any other. To avoid monotony the singer should have at his disposal a wealth of means of expression in all ranges of his voice...Before all else he should have knowledge of the advantages in the resonance of certain tones, and of their connection with each other. The *soul* must be expressed by vowel coloring, muscular tension, and relaxation; skill and knowledge as to cause and effect, management of the breath, and perfection of the throat formation must give the power to produce every dynamic gradation and detail of expression. Registers are, accordingly, produced when the singer forces a series of tones, generally ascending, upon one and the same resonating point, instead of remembering that in a progression of tones no one tone can be exactly like another, because the position of the organs must be different for each. The palate must remain elastic from the front teeth to its hindmost part, mobile and susceptible, though imperceptibly, to all changes. Very much depends on the continuous harmony of action of the soft palate and nose, which must always be in full evidence, the raising and extension of the former producing changes in the tone. If, as often happens when the registers are sharply defined, tones fall into a *cul de sac*, escape into another register is impossible, without a jump, which may lead to disaster. With every tone that the singer has to sing, he must always have the feeling that he *can* go higher and that the attack for different tones must not be forced upon one and the same point.”<sup>129</sup>

Each specific voice type has register zones and shifts through *passaggio* points that the singer should use as a guide in working through registration events. A chart showing the soprano *passaggio* points and register zones is available in Clifton Ware’s

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128. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 63.

129. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 57-8.

pedagogy book.<sup>130</sup> In addition, there are factors that affect balance between the registers that David L. Jones lists in his book. They include uneven flow of breath, jaw tension, tongue tension, poor posture, overly compressed breath, incorrect facial posture, lack of lower-body flexibility through resistance, and listening to yourself.<sup>131</sup>

### *Chest Register*

Spending time training each register of the voice while working on coordinating smooth transitions is necessary to resonance balancing. Richard Miller states that a “soprano whose voice is of fair size will most probably never need to sing any open chest sound in the lower range; she might well be more useful in performance if she has the ability to sing some or all of the pitches below Eb4 in chest mixture.”<sup>132</sup> This simply means that the larger voiced soprano has more sound to carry lower without pushing into the chest voice. In addition, it “is not unusual for a sizable soprano...to produce only thin quality...when she *sings* in lower middle voice, because she has been taught that she must remain entirely in head on all pitches that do not call for actual chest quality.”<sup>133</sup> Preference for pure chest or chest mixture might be requested by a conductor; therefore, having the ability to offer both options demonstrate flexibility. Exercises toggling between pure chest and chest mixture on a single pitch and vowel would allow a singer to

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130. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 121.

131. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 121.

132. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 136.

133. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143.

develop both choices equally. Also, Miller offers two exercises for building mixture into the chest voice in his book, *Training Soprano Voices*.<sup>134</sup>

### *Middle Register*

For larger voices, approaching the upper *passaggio* point can be the most problematic area to train. Richard Miller states that, “Heavier voices have a more distinct midpoint division than do lighter voices.”<sup>135</sup> William Vennard contends that technique must be solidified in the middle voice before extending to the lower and upper range.<sup>136</sup> David L. Jones points out that in preparing to ascend into head voice, difficulty in the upper *passaggio* transition “is directly related to the loss of laryngeal tilt in the middle register, loss of pharyngeal stretch, and loss of freedom in the tongue-root.”<sup>137</sup> As a solution, Jones offers that “Careful employment of the ‘ng’...” can be especially effective for larger-voiced singers who tend to carry too much vocal weight too high in pitch. Dramatic singers also tend to push too much breath pressure through the larynx, something that is less likely to occur when employing the ‘ng.’”<sup>138</sup> “Joan Sutherland often spoke of the importance of vocalizing the middle register correctly. She understood the value of aligning the middle register in order for the high voice to achieve

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134. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144-5.

135. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 142.

136. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 78.

137. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 156.

138. *Ibid.*, 197.

freedom.”<sup>139</sup> The dramatic soprano may find that the ability to successfully navigate the transition from middle to head voice requires the most time and patience over the course of training.

### *Head Voice*

Oftentimes, the head register is psychologically approached in isolation as if it was a separate phenomenon from the rest of the voice. Lilli Lehmann believed that the head voice should not be isolated as its own register but that there should be traces of chest resonance within the head voice.<sup>140</sup> Additionally, the higher you sing, the more breath energy you need. Modifying to a vowel such as [u] on the high note aids in keeping the larynx low and the voice matching.<sup>141</sup> Lehmann continues by describing the path for the breath that is suitable for head voice.<sup>142</sup> The singer must lift the soft palate followed by lifting the back of the tongue. The larynx must be in a position of an /a/ vowel while thinking an /i/ vowel with /u/ in the throat so that the pillars of the fauces join together so the breath has a clear journey towards the head cavity. Although combining all three of these vowels into one sound may be difficult for young singers, it is important to continue unifying the middle register through the upper *passaggio* into the head voice using these types of tools.

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139. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 147.

140. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 42.

141. *Ibid.*, 101.

142. *Ibid.*, 21.

Unifying each of the three registers is one of the ultimate goals for technical success. Miller states, “Separation of registers as a means of strengthening them is contrary to the aim of vocal registration in singing: the achievement of gradual register transition.”<sup>143</sup> Lilli Lehmann expounded by saying, “In a musical figure I must place the lowest note in such a way that I can easily reach the highest. I must, therefore, give it much more head tone than the single tone requires.”<sup>144</sup> The lower tones must not surpass the strength of the upper register, causing the upper range to manifest a feeling of buoyancy.<sup>145</sup> Utilizing the suggested exercises into daily practice allows the voice to be more pliant, flexible, and technically able to be free and agile regardless of the tessitura.

### Agility

Many dramatic voices prefer long, legato, sustained melodic lines as opposed to fast-moving, florid patterns. But, fostering an agile voice will directly influence a singer’s ability to sustain high, melodic lines with optimum vocal health and precision.<sup>146</sup> Richard Miller said, “No matter how sizable or dramatic a soprano instrument, it needs to flexibly perform rapid movement. If a singer is unable to freely move the voice in swift melismas, there will be a corresponding lack of freedom in slow, sustained passages.”<sup>147</sup> Miller advocates for daily practice of flexibility exercises as imperative to vocal development in

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143. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 133.

144. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 26.

145. Anthony Frisell, *The Soprano Voice* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Publishers, 1966), 46.

146. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 41.

147. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56.

all styles.<sup>148</sup> Clifton Ware supports Miller's view on agility by saying, "A sensation of elasticity and suppleness must ever be present in the singer's technique to safeguard against potentially negative muscular tensions and to counterbalance the technical requirements of sostenuto singing."<sup>149</sup> Miller also states:

"Agility and sostenuto are opposing poles of vocal proficiency, but both are produced by the same muscle participants. Dynamic muscle balance is determined by synergism of muscles of the torso, consisting of alternating movements of engagement and disengagement at a rapidly occurring rate, and the responding supple adjustments of the muscles and tissues of the larynx. Strength and flexibility are brought into balance."<sup>150</sup>

### Sostenuto

Richard Miller believes that developing singers should not begin study of songs and arias with a high level of sostenuto passages until they gain agility and breath management throughout the range.<sup>151</sup> "The ultimate test of technical ability lies in sustained singing. Energy and power are frequently required, but these attributes of the good singer must be balanced by freedom... The singer must learn to be schizophrenic, engaging the respiratory musculature for heavy duty while not pressing the laryngeal valve."<sup>152</sup> It is imperative not to over use the breath on the highest note of the phrase when the line continues back down, especially through the passaggio.<sup>153</sup> "Muscular

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148. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 40.

149. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 182.

150. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 40.

151. *Ibid.*, 108.

152. *Ibid.*

153. *Ibid.*, 108-9.

support should increase following a vocal climax.”<sup>154</sup> Exercises catered to developing sostenuto passages are located in Miller’s book, *Training Soprano Voices*.<sup>155</sup>

Additionally, many of the operatic roles discussed in the Performer’s Guide in Appendix B contain excellent examples of sostenuto singing.

### Interpretation

There are many interpretive and expressive tools at a singer’s disposal to use to effectively bring each operatic character to life. The use of louds and softs, crescendo and decrescendo, vowel modification, and vibrato are just a few tools commonly used to enhance the music and drama. Merely learning notes and rhythms is only the beginning for successful career preparation. Once a singer has developed a consistent use of posture and breath management, unification of the registers, and a healthy, free sound, it is appropriate to use expressive tools to advance to the next level.

### Dynamics

Technical mastery of vocal exercises is just the launching point to access the colors and contrasts in the dramatic soprano repertoire. Using dynamics as an expressive tool is imperative. Richard Miller stressed, “Controlling the quantity of sound is a major requirement of good singing. Without mastery of dynamic contrast, the best vocal production becomes inexpressive and uninteresting.”<sup>156</sup> Possessing a firm grasp on dynamic contrast and how to incorporate it into music serves to advance the portrayal of

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154. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 109.

155. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112-3.

156. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 171.

the character. Singers should be wary of eliminating proper, healthy vocal technique only to provide perceived dramatic dynamic variations. Miller said, “Many voices of potentially dramatic proportions may be permanently impaired by well-meaning teachers who, in attempting to avoid ‘pushing,’ advocate breath mixture and a general reduction of energization in singing.”<sup>157</sup>

### *Soft Singing*

A common mistake made by singers with large voices is attempting a softer sound by pulling back on the air flow which starves the sound. Richard Miller states that, “It is clear that a good singer uses efficient, lower airflow rates when singing softly than does the untrained singer.”<sup>158</sup> Finding balance within the air flow is a challenge for each individual singer and must be explored to find the best option. Miller continues by saying, “Those who can only sing at full volume must understand that poor vocal function results when one can only sing with a loud intensity.”<sup>159</sup> Karen Sell concurs saying, “The same tonal quality should be present and maintained both when singing loudly and softly. The airflow rate, although it must still be used efficiently, will be lower when singing softly.”<sup>160</sup> When practicing the art of soft singing, Lilli Lehmann said that the singer “needs only to test it to see whether he can easily make it softer without

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157. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 177.

158. *Ibid.*, 172-3.

159. Anthony Frisell, *The Soprano Voice* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Publishers, 1966), 34.

160. Karen Sell, *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy: Towards an Holistic Approach* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 126.



perceptible change in the position of the organs, and carry it higher toward the nose and the cavities of the forehead, that is, prepare a form for its continuation upward.”<sup>161</sup>

Collecting a variety of specific information from a scientific and pedagogic viewpoint is helpful when learning to sing softly. Manuel Garcia II stated, “During the pianissimo, the pharynx will be reduced to its smallest dimension, and it will dilate [*sic*] only in direct proportion to the intensity of the tone; then, in proportion to the weakening of the voice, it will return by degrees to its initial form.”<sup>162</sup> Johan Sundberg says that any rise in subglottic pressure will cause the phonation to grow louder.<sup>163</sup> Miller offers that “Pupils of Giovanni Battista Lamperti reported that the renowned maestro maintained that singing *piano* is in all respects the same as singing *forte*, except that it is softer. One does not mix breath with tone in order to reduce dynamic levels, nor does one push and squeeze in order to increase dynamic levels.”<sup>164</sup> Miller continues by stating:

“Techniques built upon the soft onset often have difficulty in eliminating an admixture of breath from the tone, unless subglottic pressure is suddenly increased at some point in the mounting dynamic level. In such techniques there is a tendency to revert to breath in the tone as a means of diminishing volume and projection. Breath admixture becomes the hallmark of some singers when they attempt piano singing.”<sup>165</sup>

### *Messa di voce*

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161. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 59.

162. Manuel Garcia II, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing: Part One*. ed. and trans. Donald V. Paschke (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 133.

163. Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 35.

164. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152.

165. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 171-2.

The *messa di voce* is one of the most effective interpretive tools a singer can possess. Richard Miller summarizes the process saying, “One begins at pianissimo level with a sustained tone, crescendoing [*sic*] to fortissimo, then decrescendoing [*sic*] back to pianissimo while maintaining uniform timbre.”<sup>166</sup> William Vennard said, “The great teachers have always recognized the overlapping of registers and the possibility of going from one to another on the same pitch, while making a crescendo or decrescendo. This is the essence of the *messa di voce*.”<sup>167</sup> When beginning a crescendo with *messa di voce*, “lung pressure must increase while laryngeal tension decreases and the vocal processes of the arytenoid cartilages spread gradually and slightly to prevent a ‘pressed’ tone quality.”<sup>168</sup> Concurrently, “On the decrescendo portion, the process is reversed, an act complicated by muscle activation patterns for releasing tension that are not necessarily the same patterns used for increasing tension.”<sup>169</sup> Daily practice of the *messa di voce* can increase your performable dynamic range. Exercises aimed at developing *messa di voce* are found in Miller’s book, *Training Soprano Voices*.<sup>170</sup>

### Vowel Modification

Another interpretive tool singers may use in their development is the use of modifying the vowels. “Vowel modification is a sophisticated technique that must be

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166. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 173.

167. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 77.

168. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 185.

169. *Ibid.*, 185-6.

170. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154-5.

tailored to each individual voice. Its application is perhaps the most subtle of all technical matters.”<sup>171</sup> Vowel purity guards against negative singing habits; but, vowels should not be adversely affected by pitch changes.<sup>172</sup> Richard Miller states:

“It is not possible to set a basic posture of mouth, lips, tongue, and jaw through which all vowels are to be sung, without distorting most (or all) of them. The jaw and the tongue are not in the same positions throughout all vowel sounds in speech; a hand placed lightly on the jaw will register considerable jaw mobility during speech; observation with a mirror will verify that the tongue is not equally flat, low, and grooved throughout the sequence of vowels.”<sup>173</sup>

According to Clifton Ware, vowel modification is natural when the vocal tract and body are in proper alignment, high mask sensations are maintained, articulation is natural, and there is enough breath being managed properly.<sup>174</sup>

Miller expounds on vowel modification by saying, “To ignore vowel modification (*aggiustamento*) throughout the ascending scale is to lay the ground for unwanted register demarcation.”<sup>175</sup> Simply stated, refusal to employ vowel modification, especially in the upper range, will cause problems in registration points. In addition, “Open singing (lack of modification of vowels) in the upper voice is detrimental to vocal health.”<sup>176</sup> “Some singers tend toward an open quality of sound because they lack the proper energization

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171. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137.

172. Anthony Frisell, *The Soprano Voice* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Publishers, 1966), 2.

173. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 74.

174. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 169.

175. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 156.

176. *Ibid.*, 158.

and physical involvement needed to achieve unified timbre in the mounting scale. On reaching the upper voice or encountering the secondo passaggio, they suddenly ‘cover,’ producing a markedly ‘woofy’ sound.”<sup>177</sup> Appelman states:

“One of the objectives of the singers of bel canto was the development of a vocal scale that was pure, unbroken, and uninterrupted. The transition of registers – either up or down the scale – demanded a modification in the tonal color of the topmost notes to prevent them from becoming disagreeable and harsh and to preserve the quality of the vowel sound as well as an even tonal line.”<sup>178</sup>

Miller concurs by saying, “If, as the mouth opens naturally with rising pitch and amplitude the integrity of the vowel is retained, the first formant will grow in strength and there will be no loss of upper harmonic partials ‘ring,’ ‘ping’. Resonance balance will pertain throughout the scale.”<sup>179</sup>

### Vibrato

Possessing a healthy vibrato is imperative to overall vocal health and provides pleasant aural experiences for an audience. It is one of the most used expressive tools in singing. Clifton Ware said, “**Vibrato** may be defined as the audible, regular pulsation, oscillation, or fluctuation of a single pitch that varies no more than a semitone or a third of a whole tone.”<sup>180</sup> Richard Miller states, “Three parameters are generally determinable in vibrato, being the fluctuation of pitch, variation of intensity, and the number of

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177. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 156.

178. *Ibid.*, 150.

179. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 75.

180. Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 180.

undulations per second.”<sup>181</sup> Six point five to seven undulations a second is considered a healthy vibrato; more than seven point five to eight undulations indicates a tremolo and below six undulations indicates a wobble.<sup>182</sup> Miller clarifies that “Despite the small oscillatory motions of intralaryngeal areas, during vibrato the basic position of the larynx remains relatively stable (unless a singer suffers from wobble or tremolo).”<sup>183</sup>

### *Tremolo*

Tremolo occurs when the shape and/or size of the resonance cavities begin to change.<sup>184</sup> Luisa Tetrazzini states, “The tremolo is a sure sign that the vocal chords [*sic*] have been stretched beyond their natural limits.”<sup>185</sup> William Vennard describes tremolo as “When the voice is under the control of the highest brain centers the muscular action is steady, and the vibrato is normal, but when the poise of the singer is inadequate, the emotional factors become dominant, the vibrato will be too fast.”<sup>186</sup> Lilli Lehmann said, “Big voices produced by large, strong organs through which the breath can flow in a broad, powerful stream, are easily disposed to suffer from the tremolo, because the

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181. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 182.

182. *Ibid.*

183. Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122.

184. Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 86.

185. Luisa Tetrazzini and Enrico Caruso, *The Art of Singing and How to Sing* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 37.

186. William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 195.

outflow of the breath against the vocal cords occurs too immediately.”<sup>187</sup> Miller also points out that “Even though vibrato rate is largely the result of the type of muscle synergy dictated by a specific technique, some high-strung individuals are prone to tremolo.”<sup>188</sup> This type of vibrato disfunction is not commonly present in dramatic voices.

### *Wobble*

The vocal wobble is more common in dramatic voices due to the tendency to sing with too much vocal weight. Cornelius L. Reid said, “Where the vibrato is a perfectly even pulsation whose amplitude is governed by intensity...the wobbly tone is a slow, wide pitch change which is caused by ‘driving’ and forcing the voice.”<sup>189</sup> Richard Miller states, “Slow vibrato rate (oscillation) usually results from slackness of the vocal folds due to insufficient resistance to airflow.”<sup>190</sup> Johan Sundberg asserts that most often a wobble is created when the epiglottis flutters.<sup>191</sup> To dispose of the wobble, Anthony Frisell suggests that the singer must lower the intensity of the sound throughout the whole range by lowering the amount of breath forcing itself through the folds.<sup>192</sup> Additional cures include eliminating any pushing in the sound and retraining each of the registers in

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187. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 70.

188. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 192.

189. Cornelius L. Reid, *Bel Canto: Principles and Practices* (New York: Coleman-Ross Company, Inc., 1950), 142.

190. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 186.

191. Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 86.

192. Anthony Frisell, *The Soprano Voice* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Publishers, 1966), 81.

the voice so they are balanced.<sup>193</sup> Jones suggests that the “Use of the *voce cuperto* can assist in solving such problems as a wide vibrato (wobble) and registration imbalance, especially in the female middle voice and upper passaggio. Additionally, it is an exercise that is instrumental in lengthening the vocal tract, encouraging more closure of the vocal folds and creating more overall resonance.”<sup>194</sup> To employ the *voce cuperto*, the student will align “all of the vowels in a similar pharyngeal space” which “creates an overall professional tonal quality. Applying the release of the pharyngeal /u/ vowel to the other vowels is fundamental in achieving” the *voce cuperto*.<sup>195</sup>

### Singing to the Sensation

While the singer is gaining knowledge and ability utilizing expressive tools within the technique, it is important that sensations are identified as correct or incorrect so that the singer can recreate healthy technique in any situation. Most young, inexperienced singers make the mistake of adjusting their singing and technique to the room and/or circumstance. Learning to sing to the sensation is a more accurate scale to judge one’s tone.<sup>196</sup> Marcia Baldwin states, “It’s important to have students *feel* rather than *listen* to themselves. You cannot hear yourself the way you are heard by listeners.”<sup>197</sup> Two reasons why we hear our own voices differently is because sound from the mouth reaches

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193. Cornelius L. Reid, *Bel Canto: Principles and Practices* (New York: Coleman-Ross Company, Inc., 1950), 143.

194. David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (Self-published, 2017), 99.

195. *Ibid.*

196. W.J. Henderson, *The Art of Singing* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1938), 41.

197. Elizabeth Blades-Zeller, *A Spectrum of Voices: Prominent American Voice Teachers Discuss the Teaching of Singing* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002), 31.

the ears with varying levels of achievement and manifestation of air and feeling in the body.<sup>198</sup> Trusting the process through sensations developed over the course of training causes the singer to achieve a greater amount of success when singing in various opera houses and recital halls. The wealth of pedagogical information related to training the whole voice is substantial. Once the singer has a solid foundation in breath management, registration events, and interpretive tools, it is appropriate to apply these techniques to the music.

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198. Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 158-9.



### CHAPTER III – CONCLUSION

Information included in this dissertation can be used as a starting point for singers, teachers, and coaches working with dramatic soprano voices. I would have benefited from this information as a younger singer in my early training if I had known how to find, digest, and assimilate this information. The dramatic soprano *Fach* is considered to be rare; therefore, the information readily available to aid in healthy development from a technical perspective is not as prominent as other more common voice types.

Deborah Voigt said that dramatic sopranos must possess an “emotional depth and intensity – something one needs when singing the repertoire of grand characters with big, emotional arcs.”<sup>199</sup> Possessing technical and pedagogical information can be useless if the singer cannot apply its many aspects to role study and performance. In Astrid Varnay’s work with Hermann Weigert prior to her Metropolitan debut, she gives a representation of how she approached role study. “First we would delve into the details of the character and the other people in the story, as they are expressed both verbally and musically. Once I had a clear mental picture of who I was, what I was feeling and doing, and why, I would finally be asked to express my knowledge in singing. We would then continue in even greater detail.”<sup>200</sup> She continues by saying,

“When it comes to repertoire, it is worthless simply to learn one aria after another. When you start having a career, you will need to know the scores from start to finish, with all their challenges and pitfalls. It is certainly not a must to be able to read an orchestral score, but a thoroughgoing knowledge of the accompaniment

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199. Deborah Voigt, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-To-Earth Diva* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 72.

200. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-Five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 76.

and the orchestral sounds that will be cueing and supporting your performance is absolutely imperative.”<sup>201</sup>

Appendix B offers extensive information related to composers, operas, and characters appropriate for the dramatic soprano *Fach*. Taking time to read the full interview transcriptions in Appendix A can also be helpful and provides practical life application and advice for young dramatic sopranos.

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201. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-Five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 344.

## APPENDIX A – Interview Transcripts

### Singing Experts

#### **Debbie Voigt: phone interview on May 24, 2016**

*How did you get started in a singing career?*

As far as I can remember I have always wanted to sing. There's no question in my mind but that singing was something that gave me an enormous amount of joy. I could see that I would get a response from people that was visceral, and it was really exciting. It made me feel like I had something unique. I took piano lessons until I went to high school. At that point, I thought I should take some singing lessons. I could have gone to a teacher in Los Angeles who was teaching people like Michael Jackson and Barbra Streisand, but she was very expensive and very far away from my parent's home. My folks suggested that I take lessons with the wife of my choral conducting teacher. She was an opera singer. That's how I began my journey towards becoming an opera singer. It wasn't something that I was drawn to as an art form. I just liked to sing and followed the instructions that I was given.

*When did you realize that you had a larger vocal instrument?*

I don't think I recognized that until quite a bit later. At the age of 24, I was doing the Met and Merola auditions. For the first time, I was surrounded by people who were studying to be opera singers. Up until that time, I had been surrounded primarily by people who wanted to be co-conducting majors or voice teachers. I didn't recognize that my voice was necessarily any larger than anyone else's voice. I only knew that it was very focused and that my voice pretty much sat in the back. I didn't go through that breathy stage that a lot of young people go through. When I finally got to those levels, I began to realize that my voice was bigger than some of the other people that I was singing with. The coaches that I was working with started to put in my head that I had a voice that was made for *spinto* soprano roles. My voice was presenting well for Verdi and early Strauss.

*What technical vocal problems did you struggle with as a young singer?*

I don't know that I dealt with many vocal problems. I dealt more with emotional problems in terms of accepting that this really was something I could dedicate my life to, and that it would be something that I would eventually be able to make a living doing. It was a little difficult with my parents, as well. It wasn't that they believed that opera was devil music or anything like that, but I don't think that they truly understood the nature of the talent that I had and that it would be something that I could do full time. Like most parents of musicians who strike out on their way, they start to wonder if we will be able to turn it into a money-making venture.

In my early to mid-thirties, I had a hard time letting my middle voice develop the way that it needed to in order to sing Brünnhilde and Isolde and some of the other roles that I would sing later on. I remember rehearsing the role of Chrysothemis in a new production at the Met and I got a phone call from my manager saying that she had heard from the administration that Maestro Levine was concerned that the middle part of my voice was not developing in a way that he had hoped it would in light of where he saw my repertoire going in the future. This was a risky conversation for my manager to have with me in the middle of a run of performances. In fact, we were in the final orchestra rehearsals. Being emotional, fearful, and insecure as we are, oftentimes these kinds of conversations will come up between an opera company and a manager to spare the singer's feelings of well-being and confidence, but the conversations usually don't happen until the production is over with. By then it's too late to do anything and you may not be back at that opera house for two years. Much to the credit of my manager and one of the reasons that I was with him for so long and trusted him so implicitly is that he told me immediately. He said, "This is what Dean said and I am not in the position to tell you what to do about it, but I'm telling you so that if you know what you can do, you can do it." At that time, I had been working with Ruth Falcon, but she was still having a singing career of her own. So, I started studying with a guy named Bill Riley, who was a baritone, and we spent a lot of time working on the middle part of my voice. I think it was just that fear factor that we have, especially as sopranos, that if we put too much weight in our middle voice, we won't be able to access the top of our voice. He explained the concept of approaching each note with what he called a surge and diminuendo effect. Rather than hitting the note, sitting on it, and pressing it, he would have me surge into it then diminuendo off the note so that I didn't feel that sense of pressure and I could rise above. I practiced with him for a day, went into an orchestra rehearsal the next day, and tried to do what he was talking about. [I've always been a very quick study and the minute that someone tells me to correct something, generally I can. That is a unique gift. Unfortunately, I find that when I work with young singers, their ability to retain what they're told in a morning lesson and apply it to an evening production or rehearsal is often lost. I don't know whether it's a nervous thing that kicks in and they just go back to what they rely upon or if it is trusting the information. But, in essence, I am able to put that aside.] The next day I got a phone call and the voice on the other end of the phone said, "Hi baby. This is Jimmy." I thought, Well there is only one Jimmy I know, and he tended to call us all baby. I said, "Well, hello." I think he could tell I didn't know who he really was, and he said that he was Jimmy Levine. I said, "Oh, hi," and he said, "I just wanted to let you know that that rehearsal was fantastic and that's exactly what I'm talking about and you're absolutely on the right track." So, that was something that wasn't necessarily a problem, but it could have been had I not had people around me whom I trusted and who were willing to give me the information that I needed so I could try to make a change in mid-performance schedule.

*Were there any big moments where you felt like your voice changed?*

There were big moments in recognizing that I was singing well, that I was having great success with the audience and with my colleagues, and with the administration of the

opera houses. But I still take voice lessons and I think especially as women, with the hormonal changes we go through when we come of a certain age, have a lot more to think about than our male colleagues. I am constantly having to think about my voice and what is working now and what I would do better. I won't sing the Kaiserin again. Those high notes that are sitting up there in that register are just not where I'm comfortable anymore. It's also too hard to look at my vocal abilities ten years ago and try to replicate those now. It is not possible. It's not possible for anyone. No one sings the same from the beginning of their career to the end of their career. People that are fortunate enough to be in a *Fach* that allows them to age gracefully into roles that require a steelier and edgier sound are blessed. Also, spending years and years being on stage and knowing how to develop a character is very helpful. I'm really lucky that I was born into the *Fach* that I was.

*What operatic repertoire felt the most comfortable to you as a young singer?*

Well, it would not have been Donna Anna or Fiordiligi or any of the Mozart stuff. I sang it well, but I didn't love it and I didn't necessarily love those characters. I focused a lot on recital repertoire; especially, the German repertoire. The complexity of what's being said in that repertoire is exciting. I ultimately began to graduate to Ariadne and Elsa and Elizabeth. That's when I started to get excited. Singing Leonora in *Forza del Destino* and Amelia in *Ballo* were vocally so much more exciting to me. You take the big steps later. Don't come out of college singing *Ballo in Maschera*.

*Is there a role you felt helped solidify your technique?*

I don't think that I could say that one role defined my technique so much as my technique defined what roles I would be able to do. If you look at the Kaiserin you wouldn't approach that role and then find out that your technique works. You have to have confidence in your technique before you take on a role like that. And the same would be true of the first time that I read through *Tristan and Isolde*. It would be years before I would even be offered it, but my teacher and I thought we should see what I could do with it. Was it something that I should start to put out there and something I wanted to sing? After we got through the first act I thought, maybe, and then we got to the second act and I thought, no way. It's just not time. It was just too long, and the tessitura was too difficult. The poetry was complicated in a way that I now realize is just plain old complicated. The language that he uses and the descriptions of being out of time and out of body was just something that I couldn't relate to at that time in my life. We put it aside for several years and it really wasn't until I was offered the role in Vienna that I brought it back out again. It was still a little premature, but it was a new production. It was a long rehearsal period and I thought, this kind of opportunity doesn't come along very often. So, I took it and I took it with the caveat that I wouldn't accept any further performances of *Tristan and Isolde* until I had sung the performances to see how it went. I didn't want to say yes to several theaters down the road and then find out that it was really not the right fit for me and have to cancel a bunch of things. I sang her and then I didn't sing her again for maybe three or four years. That was probably a smart thing to do.

*What are some arias that proved to be helpful in cementing your vocal technique?*

Before we get to arias we need to get through the 24 Italian songs and arias, some German Lieder, and some French chansons. Then you can begin to access what you should be singing. I am a firm believer in starting out with Mozart or Handel if there's something in there you know suits your voice. They may not suit your temperament. They didn't suit mine. But they were a safe place to begin. Then I sang *Freischütz* and *Oberon*. They were moving a little bit more towards the dramatic side of things. There's *Romeo and Juliet*. There are roles that don't have you stepping into your big girl opera pants just yet. But unfortunately, unless you're a student who happens to have studied operatic repertoire inside out and knows your voice intimately, you're going to have to trust the people around you. I was lucky that I had people around me that I could trust. They had me doing scenes from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and things like that. I could gain experience, but it wasn't going to do me any damage. I think the first full lyric role that I took on was *Suor Angelica*. That's not what one would necessarily call a dramatic role. But you also have Liu in *Turandot*. You have Micaela that isn't going to get you into trouble while you're getting your operatic chops together. It ultimately becomes a matter of having good instruction and I'm not sure that that is running rampant in our business. A singer must learn to trust sensation. If something doesn't feel good, you are getting fatigued, and your throat is collapsing, then you are singing the wrong repertoire. You must learn to trust your own instincts.

*Do you still struggle with some of the same pedagogical problems as you did at the beginning of your career?*

Yes, I think so. If you go through as long and public a career as I have then these things are often pointed out. I was scrutinized because of weight loss and how that affected or didn't affect my voice. It was also difficult to learn how to reuse this new instrument and it's something that I still struggle with. I have now started working with a new teacher because I feel I have not connected to that former voice when I could just open my mouth and let the weight just engage the sound that flew out in the opera house. Then I ask myself what I want to sing now. I would love to sing Ortrud. I spent a lot of time learning how to be on stage and perfecting my acting abilities. I want to continue to do that, but I don't want to carry the high notes all night. Learning how to sing lower in my body is something that I'm working on.

*What are some solutions your teachers gave you to fix these technical issues?*

I was working with a teacher who was having me open my ribs more and use them while singing. We all feel like we need to have something tangible to hang on to in supporting that part of the body. I'm learning that the ribs are open, but I had to learn how to expand the lower part of my body and my abdomen. If I take my fist and put it just above the hip bone, I need to be breathing into that area. I was breathing too high. Having been such a larger singer for so long I think I was breathing too high because if I breathed low, I was

expanding that entire lower region of my body. It was a mental hang up because I felt like I looked bigger. So, I'm getting back to practicing correct breathing in my own practice and trying to pass that information along to the people I'm working with.

*Did you find any solutions to the problems through self-discovery?*

I think other people offer ideas but ultimately, it's up to you in the practice room to find out what feels right. I get very concerned today when I listen to singers because I think that they spend too much time listening to themselves. There are so many devices by which they can record their sound and listen back to it. I don't feel that that's the healthiest way to do it. In fact, recently when singers have asked me if I mind if they record their lessons, my advice to them is that they not record because what is important is what they remember in terms of sensation. If they don't feel the difference between what they did and what I corrected, they're not going to get it listening to themselves. They need to correlate what they did physically in order to produce the sound that is more pleasing to them. Every house you sing in is going to sound different from any other house; therefore, it's necessary that you learn how to sing by sensation.

*How has aging changed your voice?*

I don't want to live in the top part of my voice the way I used to. Isolde is one I want to consider accepting because she doesn't sit at the top of her voice all night. Roles like the Kaiserin do sit high. Brünnhilde would be wonderful except for the *Siegfried*. I'm trying to look at other roles that are more dramatic but don't require me to carry the evening in terms of the higher aspect of things. I would like to do the Dyr's wife in *Frau ohne Schatten* because I think she's an interesting character role and it's not required that she be singing high C's and high D's all night. It's those kinds of roles I'm looking at. I just accepted a full-time teaching position in San Francisco and I'm excited about that aspect of my life. I will certainly continue to sing and I'm dying to do certain musicals. I'm dying to do *Sweeney Todd*. I want to do a lot more concert singing, recitals, and performances. Unfortunately, being part of academia is not going to allow me to take six weeks off to run around doing operas. So, I'm not sure how all that's going to balance yet. We'll see. I know there's something coming up at the Met in a couple of seasons and it's going to present a scheduling problem. I'm sure that San Francisco Conservatory of Music considers it in their best interest that I get out and sing as much as possible because it's recruitment. But as I'm entering my first year there and still trying to figure out where I'm going to live and get that all settled it's a little overwhelming to be thinking about the roles I want to sing. I know it will all work out.

*Do you feel like the quality of your voice has changed, as well?*

I think probably it has. I think that the middle part of my voice is darkening and that's a good thing if I'm going to sing some of these other roles. I'm going to have to have more sound in the middle part of my voice. I do think that there is a certain amount of steeliness in my high voice that wasn't there before, and I don't know if I equate that to

weight loss or if I equate that to natural maturation of a voice that progresses into Brünnhilde. You don't sing Brünnhilde if you've got a big plushy Puccini-esque, Verdi-esque voice. It just doesn't work that way. My life has been very complex, and I've been very open and very honest about certain things. By doing so, you allow yourself to be scrutinized in ways that other people don't and aren't. If someone has a ten-year operatic career now, that's considered a long career. I made my Met debut twenty-five years ago, so it's kind of the nature of the beast. You go through a honeymoon period where everything you do from the first three to five years of your life is brilliant and wonderful and fantastic. Then people start to hear you again and they say, "It's good, but what else can she do?" It's a constant reinventing of yourself and reintroducing repertoire to an audience that knows you and loves you and wants to love you. You keep earning that respect and that love and that means a lot of new repertoire. I thought I would be done learning my repertoire after ten years. It's an enormous amount of pressure and I grow a little bit weary of it. If I accept an operatic role it is something that I really, really want to study. For the most part, I've had great ladies to sing.

*What role changed your life the most and why?*

Salome changed my life because I never thought I would sing it on stage. That was a cathartic thing having to do with weight loss. I think that Minnie, the *Girl of the Golden West*, changed my life because I could identify with her in a lot of ways. She's American, blonde, and blue-eyed. She believed in the Bible and she treats the landlords with respect. They give her respect in return. I love her description of the relationship that she experienced in watching her parents, which was not something I necessarily observed in my life. And then Brünnhilde, without question, changed my life. It's so epic and there's nowhere to go from Brünnhilde. She's such a complete character and the journey that we see her take from the minute we meet her to where she ends up is like nothing else in opera. I defy anyone to tell me of any operatic character that has that kind of life over the course of three evenings. She goes from a young tomboy to becoming mortal and falling in love. Then she exacts revenge over the hatred and betrayal of Siegfried. Her acceptance of this betrayal leads to her ultimate sacrifice to right the world. There's no other character like that in opera.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

I think that dramatic sopranos require more time and I think they also would benefit from studying with someone who has had a dramatic voice. My primary teacher, Jane Paul, had sung the repertoire that I sang, and I think that's important. A singer needs to have the courage to have done their homework, to have looked at the vocal progression of singers like myself, Birgit Nilsson, and Leonie Rysanek. Look at where we all started. We didn't come out of college singing Brünnhilde. It doesn't work that way. I think that there are some institutes out there that will collect singers' money and try to turn them into dramatic voices when in fact, they are not dramatic voices. It takes a lot of time and that is not time that is wasted. It's time that you spend learning recital repertoire, concert



repertoire, the Beethoven “Solemnis,” and Verdi Requiems. Maybe you'll have a lot to sing and maybe you won't, but it takes time and patience. If someone tells you that you're ready to be a dramatic soprano at age 30 they are wrong. You're not. You might be singing *Ballo*. You might be singing *Traviata*, if that is your route. I think that singers are pushed for the wrong reasons and pushed by a particular administration that wouldn't know good singing if it fell out of a lunch bag. But that's just the nature of where we are. You can take a role because it's being offered to you and you want to do it, but you must have the knowledge that ten years from now you may very well not be able to do it and there is no going back. You aren't going to sing Brünnhilde and then sing The Countess in *Figaro*. It's not going to work that way. It's tough but you need to have teachers that you trust, not the teacher who's the flavor of the moment. Find a teacher who you can identify with vocally and emotionally. Choose someone who understands that this is going to take you time and is going to put the horse reins on you. You have to trust that person and if you don't believe in them, go somewhere else. Do what you're going to do and be ready to take the consequences.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding a successful career?*

I would encourage them to have a balanced life. The kind of career that I've been very fortunate to have has been all-consuming. It has meant being on the road constantly. It has meant being alone an enormous amount of time, especially since social media was not the rage when I came out of the gate. I didn't have as many means to connect to people. Find a hobby. Learn to love to read. When I first started singing in Europe there was no television. Enjoy the moment and try not to get ahead of yourself. You can't control anything that's happened in the past and you can't control what's going to happen in the future. Just try to do the best you can.

**Susan Bullock: Skype interview on May 29, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your vocal journey.*

I started singing in choirs, school plays, and school concerts with all the other kids. But because I could play the piano and could read music, I was always put on the alto or mezzo lines to do the harmonies. Obviously, I had a voice that was a bit different from the other kids. I could hold a line, I could sing a solo, but I had no vision of becoming a singer in any shape or form. It was just something that I did at school. Around the age of sixteen or seventeen, I decided to go to Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music one Saturday morning. By then I was quite a good pianist, but I wanted to improve this sort of harmony, history, that kind of stuff. They required two instruments, but I didn't have two instruments. I could just play the piano. But somebody said, “Well, you can sing in tune. Just sing for them and that will fulfill the requirements. Off you go.” When I sang for them, they wanted me to take singing lessons. Until that moment, I had absolutely no idea that I was even remotely good enough to have singing lessons or that I could actually do it for a job. I attended the college for the last eighteen months of my

high school life. I then went to London University and acquired a music degree while continuing singing lessons. By then it became apparent that I really was interested in singing and wanted to pursue it more. I went as a post graduate to the Royal Academy of Music in London and then joined the Glyndebourne Chorus as a chorister for two years. Then I went back into study for one year at the National Opera Studio, which is a course for twelve students. We learned roles and it is a kind of intensive finishing school kind of thing. From there I went to the English National Opera that at that point had a huge company of singers with the resident company of which I became a member. So that is how it sort of started.

*Can you briefly describe your career in its current stage?*

At this very moment I'm about to go into stage and orchestra rehearsal of a new production of *Elektra* in Prague, singing Elektra. It's my sixteenth production of the role. In fact, I did it at the Met with Debbie Voigt and Princeton. I'm fifty-seven-years-old so this may very well be one of the last productions that I do as Elektra. It's a huge piece. It's a huge emotional piece. I think my voice is still fine, I can still sing it. In fact, some think I'm singing it better now than I've ever sung it but that just comes with time. Having given it a break, as well, for a couple of years was a very good thing because at one point, they were just rolling one right after another. So that's what I'm doing and I'm going into some new repertoire. I've also just finished *Makropulous Case*. Then I'm going in to do the Mother and the Witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, a new production, and also, my first Kostelnička in *Jenůfa* is coming up. A few years from now, I'm actually going to follow in the footsteps of a lot of old Elektra's and take on the Klytaemnestra. So, opera and then recitals. I've got recitals coming up in Vienna and Italy and I'm keeping the concert work going, as well.

*Where do you see yourself in five years?*

If everything goes well, still singing. Probably going into more character parts. I don't mean full character parts, but things like Lady Billows, the sort of stuff that uses the voice that one has in a different framework, really.

*When did you realize you had a larger vocal instrument?*

It wasn't ever a kind of waking up and realizing something had changed. It was a very, very, very, slow, slow process. And it wasn't one that I was actively searching for; but as my voice developed, I took on repertoire that suited that vocal stage. There was never one great big goal to sing Brünnhilde, Elektra, Isolde or any of that stuff. But I suppose about 1997, I was asked to sing the *Ägyptische Helena*. Then the production went to the Met quite a few years ago and Debbie sang it. I sang it in Britain and that was the first step into a long role with the bigger orchestra and the more dramatic repertoire. That went well and basically people came to me and said, "Look, we hear this meat in your voice now and we think you should move towards it." I have a coach that I've been working with during my career and we discussed where to go after this and that seemed to be the

next logical step. But, that Egyptian Helen came from things like *Jenůfa* and Ellen Orford. I started off as Pamina, Gilda, and Marguerite in *Faust* and all that kind of stuff and moved right through, very slowly, to Alice Ford, *Jenůfa*'s, Kát'a. It wasn't ever a sudden big leap. It wasn't always what it is now.

*What technical vocal problems did you struggle with as a young singer, before the age of thirty?*

I think my problem was that as a young singer I used to sing Queen of the Night and that kind of stuff because I had this real acidity for faster music. I could sing runs and high notes with ease. I wasn't that kind of character. The closest was Gilda because the part in "Caro nome" is completely different from the rest of *Rigoletto*. Gilda's role is much more lyrical and much more involved as a dramatic person in the rest of the opera. I think the struggle I had wasn't so much technical as it was of asking, where do I fit? My voice can do one thing, but my head and my heart want to do something else. I was never very good at just standing at the front in a nice dress and singing. Micaëla bored me rigid. I had a very easy, very gradual development but there were little moments along the way when I thought, "Well, where do I go now?" Luckily, I was guided. I didn't have any technical dramas.

*What tools did you use to overcome those struggles between, oh, my voice does this, but I feel like this?*

I think I am lucky to have the same coach, not the same teacher, but the same vocal coach since 1986. Whenever I was at a crossroads or was hearing changes in my voice, we would always discuss it and find repertoire that would help with what was happening. I think I overcame the changes by putting it into action. I would work with him on something, for example, and he would say to me, "Oh my goodness, that's a Tatyana sound. That's a Tatyana in *Onegin* sound. Ok, bring that next time." So as things were changing, we kind of snuck it into the repertoire. I had very good guidance, really.

*What operatic repertoire felt the most comfortable to you as a younger singer?*

I've always been interested in the repertoire where there's real action and real characters as opposed to vocal exhibitionism. I was doing things like Butterfly and Mimi, which were roles I could get my teeth into it and act; anything that really spoke to me on the dramatic side in the truest sense of the word. The dramatic side was much more appealing. I also love things like *Jenůfa*. I love the comedy of Alice. I hated Micaëla. I hated it. It was sort of a cardboard cutout of a character that didn't speak to me in any way, shape, or form.

*Is there a particular role you felt help to solidify your technique?*

I think doing Butterfly certainly did. I think that was a really huge developmental stage because it has everything. It has all the high stuff and a lot of the middle stuff. You have

to work it out as a young singer as to how much to give in the middle of the voice so that you don't damage the top of the voice and having to balance it all. I think that was the best technical exam you could ever wish for, really, in terms of having to negotiate your way through the piece. Definitely.

*What are some specific arias that proved to be helpful in cementing your vocal technique?*

I'd say the characters from *Figaro*. It's tough in terms of line and legato and negotiating the *passaggio*. It is a good one to go back to now and think about, really. I think the big scene from *Jenůfa* is very, very helpful. All the Butterfly arias, "Che tu madre," "Un bel di," and the final scene all have their technical demands that you really have to conquer. You can't kind of wing it.

*Do you still struggle with the same pedagogical problems as you did in the beginning of your career?*

Yes, I think always from the very beginning, because I had quite an easy voice. It would warm up in flash. I didn't have to work it, massage it into being. But I think I always was a little bit cavalier about the *passaggio*; therefore, I've always made it my business to spend a lot of time on the *passaggio* when I do warm up. There would be times when I thought, oh yes, my voice is fine, but then I would get into a situation and think, oh no, this is feeling tight, and it's because it has not been awakened properly. So, I think that's something I've always carried along with me.

*What are some solutions your teachers or coaches gave you to fix technical issues?*

I'd say always keeping the ability to sing piano. Always warm up from piano or pianissimo, even, and using that to find the real core of the sound, not just by going wham, you know, like a hammer. Keep a very stream-lined thought process by thinking about focus and of course, thinking about breathing and supporting the sound. Because I have a round face, it's very easy to think that way naturally. Always think longer. I needed to make space and depth and those would be the common things that have carried on throughout the years.

*Was singing high and soft something that always came naturally to you?*

It was but it has changed over the years. Floating was like a calling card, but as my voice grew and as I've gotten older, it's something that I have to actually sit down and work out.

*What is your process? How do you do it?*

Obviously, you can't just get out of bed and float. You think, there's got to be way of working out how to do it, so you think more about supporting the sound and where it is

placed and what's going on in the face and where the soft palate is and all that stuff. It's a case of having to sit down and work out the nuts and bolts of it, really.

*I recently heard a teacher describe going from the louder sound to the softer sound as just shifting the frontal resonance back. Is that something you've heard?*

I always avoid anything that says *back*. I think *back* gives the wrong signal. It means it can kind of get swallowed or something. I think always keeping it, not forward in a kind of stupid forward way, but making sure this is all buzzing here in the mask. Once you say the word *back*, I'm going to be thinking somewhere down in my throat, which isn't going to be good. It's just a terminology thing, isn't it? We all react to different expressions. There's not a one size fits all, you know. Everybody's physical make up is different. Certain bits of your face and my face might work in a different way than somebody with a completely different shaped face or a different physique or whatever it is. I've got a teacher in Italy who is an American, Sherman Lowe, and he's a wonderful, wonderful technician, but he never does the same thing twice with the same two people. My husband is a tenor and studies with him, as well. Our lessons are back to back and he will do completely different things with him than he'll do with me; and yet, sometimes the effect that one's going for in both cases is the same. But the way it's achieved is different.

*Did you find any solutions to your problems through self-discovery?*

I had a few years when both my parents were sick. Then my father died, I was doing *The Consul* in Argentina, and my mother was diagnosed with cancer and died later. That was all horrible and the emotional pressure affects you vocally. I had to always be sure that I took myself off into a room and put my head in the right place and try to switch off from what was going on in my real life. It was hard. Once you put your going-to-work clothes on, then you've got to put your private life to one side. It isn't always easy, but I think you've got to give yourself a good talking to and decide to either go ahead with the project or walk away. If you can't learn it, walk away. If you can learn it, then you've got to put yourself into it 200 percent. There are a lot of little chats going on in your own head the whole time and very often I've had a little devil on my shoulder saying, "Are you going to mess this up now?" Little voices are in your ear that say, "You're going to wreck this next passage." The other side of the ear says, "No, I'm not, I'm going to do it." It's a confidence thing, self-belief or whatever you want to call it.

*When did you feel your vocal technique settle?*

I would probably think around the time I was doing *Butterfly*, around 1990ish. That was a huge settling point in many ways because suddenly it was the right repertoire for my voice and for my head. You know, all the technical demands that you need. I think probably meeting Sherman in early 2000, was another kind of dust settling moment. Learning things like *Brünnhilde*, *Elektra*, *Isolde*, all that stuff and having to work it out technically has been an on-going settling, really. Going through menopause is a whole other story, you know. You've got to think ahead of the game now and work it out. I

know sopranos who lose the middle of the voice at that point. So, we made a point of working hard and strengthening that and always made sure that was taken care of. It's an acceptance with whatever you're doing, in my case anyway, for sure. As you progress it adapts, changes, settles, and then it moves on to somewhere else.

*Did the settling change your repertoire?*

Not really, no. I think I'm just one of those lucky people that has a high voice that can do a lot of flexible stuff and then suddenly, the weight in the sound just came in gradually without being forced into the sound or being superimposed. You never know how your voice is going to develop. You see so many Susanna's that hit the wall at 30 because it doesn't go anywhere else and others develop into Countesses and go on to other stuff. I think I was one of those that had a slow journey and eventually, this repertoire became the next natural stage.

*How has your voice changed as you've gotten older?*

Well, it has grown in size, obviously. It's still the same core sound but somehow, it's just got a lot more depth to it. It's fuller and richer. It's got more blade in it than it used to have. But then again, I always go back to singing piano and pianissimo as much as I can. That's why I do a lot of songs and recital repertoire because I think it's very good to scale it down. It's just a bigger version of what it always was.

*Do you feel the quality of your voice has changed?*

I think so, yes. I mean it sounds older, of course, because I am older. It has been a gradual change. I'd love to hear a recording of what my first Elektra was like compared to this one now to see the difference.

*What role changed your life the most and why?*

It was more than one. I think it was Butterfly because it was the first time I'd had a real title role. It was a chance to carry a show on my own and to really act. The production was a grand production, which was incredibly intense and incredibly real, and there was nowhere else to hide. We worked on floating around sort of mock-Japanese style. It was, really, full-on. I think the Consul with Menotti also changed me both vocally and dramatically. Learning how to really project very raw human emotion was a real learning curve. And then the *Ägyptische* Helena was a huge stepping stone into the Brünnhilde, the Isolde, and the Elektra because I didn't go to Wagner via Ava, or Elizabeth or a Rhinemaiden. The most famous Wagner I ever sang was Isolde, so it was boom, straight in there. Yeah, it's crazy. I think those three were all significant points along the way, really. And once I started singing Elektra, it suddenly opened-up a whole different world, as well. I think the nature of the pieces, the characters, and what's required of them and of you as an actor let alone as a singer, is important.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

I think if I was to say yes it would be because I think the temptation for the voice type is to forget that there are two sides of the coin and it's not just about producing this huge noise when it's required. The scale of dynamics, I think, is often forgotten and it's all about making the noise. With good conductors who actually do what's on the page, it's not always about loud and that's the misconception I think that if you are a dramatic soprano it doesn't automatically equal loud. Of course, it equals loud when it's required, but it also equals a lot of colors, as well. I think training dramatic sopranos to sing with color is a very, very important thing.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

Probably not the way I did which was a bit like instant. For young people in their mid-twenties, for me, it's still up for grabs whether they are a dramatic. A voice that shows dramatic potential should look at good lyric roles such as Janáček's *Kát'a*, *Jenůfa*, Eva, Elizabeth, maybe Chrysothemis. You know, these kinds of the sisters, the younger ones, the Valkyrie's. Learn the Valkyrie, learn a Norn, learn a Rhinemaiden, Guttrune, Freia, lesser Wagnerian roles. Something like Arabella is a useful tool for a would-be dramatic soprano because it's full but it's lyric. I think maintaining the lyrical aspect is crucial.

*What roles would you suggest for study in the thirties?*

I'm just trying to think what I was doing between thirty and forty. I was doing Butterfly, Tosca, *Jenůfa*, *Kát'a*, and Ellen Orford. I did Boito's *Mefistofele* and Marguerite and Helena. Yes, so I would say at that point look at something like Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser*, Elsa, that sort of stuff. It's a kind of *Jugendlich dramatischer* as they say in Germany, the young dramatic.

*Have you ever done Turandot?*

No, I've always turned it down. I've been asked many times to do it and I can sing all the notes, but it doesn't say anything to me as a character. I just think it's a lot of pain for not a lot of gain, really. Lots of people have told me I could do it and make it interesting and real and could make it be a person. It's all there in the music, but it just doesn't float my boat, really.

*The next two questions are summary questions. Since the focus of the dissertation is on pedagogical challenges related to the dramatic soprano voice type, what would be the top three pedagogical or technical issues you had over the course of your career and the solutions that you felt helped you overcome them?*

Definitely keep the color matching with the top of the voice as the whole voice gets heavier. Make sure the sound matches right up through the range. I think you should

never put too much weight in the middle because you can't take that weight up with you. Keeping the registers matching has probably been the biggest mission. Also, to be very sparing with the use of the chest voice and to use more of a mixed voice sound than suddenly turning into a kind of baritone. Mix the sound and make sure that you're very selective about how you use both extremes of the range. Have great care. Realize that once your voice is singing well with Brünnhilde and Elektra, it's not likely that you'll sing Queen of the Night's high F's anymore, but you can still warm up to D's and D flats. Make sure that you've always got a couple of notes above the notes that you actually need. Most dramatic soprano roles don't really go above a high C. It's making sure that you keep the elasticity in the range, as well.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos working towards a successful career?*

Take your time and don't always sing loud. Look at the dynamics, look at the score, because these composers write perfectly. When you look at every Wagner score, there are all these diminuendos in the orchestra before the voices come in. Very rarely does Wagner swamp you deliberately and when he does, it's because he wants that to be part of the general color. Take your time and look at the dynamics. Don't feel like it needs to be full-on loud, loud, loud because the danger there is that if you go into a conductor and sing loud, loud, loud they'll think they can whip-up the orchestra. They make one hell of a racket and it becomes a barrage of noise. I think it's very interesting when you do what's on the page because it actually gives much more light and shade to a performance. Always use interesting contrasts of colors...colors, colors, colors, colors and text.

*What was your process when you sat down and said, "Ok, it's time to learn Isolde. I've been hired to sing this." Did you start with the text? Did you learn the melody by sitting down and accompanying yourself on the piano while singing through it?*

I read the text several times without even thinking about looking at the notes. I read it as a story and as a character. In fact, I was in New York at the time singing Butterfly at City Opera while I was learning Isolde. I decided it was far too terrifying to try to look at great big chunks of it. I've always used the same process, really. I take two or three pages or a section and sit and sit and sit and bash that out until I can sing it. Then I build on that by learning another two or three pages or section and sing it through from the beginning each time. So, it's a very slow, laborious process, but a process that never leaves you. When the phone rings and they say, "Oh, can you come and sing it tomorrow?" and you haven't sung it for four years or something, it's there because it's absolutely imbedded in your being. Slow, slow, slow...everything's slow. You can't learn this stuff in a hurry and if you do, you risk damaging your own vocal cords and you won't remember it. It's actually a hurry to nothing, really.

*With knowing the aim of this subject, have I missed anything or is there anything you feel like you need to add from your own personal experience?*



The other thing I would say is don't be tempted to hurry because it's a very small club once you're in it. There aren't many Elektras and Brünnhildes. People inevitably get sick and they have to pull from a small pool of people to take over. It's very tempting to think yes, of course I can go, but you've got to be very careful that you don't handle your voice endlessly. Rest is as good as anything to promote longevity, if you want to do it for a long time. If you want a five-year whoosh career then great, go for it. But if you want to still be singing at nearly sixty, you need to be wise. Always be totally prepared. I never show up half-prepared. Never be half-prepared. When you arrive on day one of rehearsal with this repertoire, you have to know it. You can't learn it on the hoof, you can't. It has to be absolutely sung into the body. Another top tip which John Tomlinson told me is never mark because you're not training your muscles that way. By marking it you're faking it and when it comes to doing a six-hour general rehearsal, it gets dimmer. When you haven't sung it in the rehearsals, you're screwed. You can't do it. You've got to train the body and the muscles and the brain. You've got to work out where you can take it back and where you can let go. It's a kind of sporting event, if you like.

**Abigail Dyer: in person interview on June 15, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your vocal journey.*

I sang musical theater as a child, but the beginning of my classical training was in college. The first week of college I auditioned for a choir. The choir director said, "You're a dramatic soprano. You're a Wagnerian and you need to be taking voice lessons." I said, "I don't like opera." I had seen *Turandot* as a seven-year-old, but I had no idea what was going on. I was bored to tears and I thought the music was ugly; therefore, I decided I didn't like opera. He said, "Look, go to the opera. You're not far from Manhattan," and I did. I saw *La traviata* and fell back in love with opera. I started taking lessons in college, but I really didn't get very far until my junior year while in Spain as a Spanish language and literature major. At the public library I would sit outside the practice rooms to listen. For those who sang really well, I would inquire about their teacher. The same woman's name came up three times in a row. That teacher's name was Ángeles Chamorro who is sadly no longer with us. I sang for her and she said, "Your voice is a mess but it's really, really good so come twice a week for half an hour at a time. We're not going to do repertoire, we're just going to get your basic technique together." That's the basis of my technique now and it's remarkably similar to what I'm learning in Berlin. Ángeles Chamorro's teacher studied in Berlin so it's very consistent. When I came back to America, everybody told me that I was doing everything wrong. They asked why I was singing with a lot of metal and ping in my voice. They told me to take it out because it was too noisy. I was told to round and darken and cover but back came the tongue tension and the jaw tension and the hootiness. The voice still showed potential, but it became a hot mess. It wasn't until I got back to Berlin that Gundula started sorting things out.

*Briefly describe your career in its current stage.*

I'm just starting out, but I have a really good agent in Berlin. I will likely be guesting in five years because there's not much call for *Hochdramatischer* sopranos in Fest positions; although, some do exist.

*Why is that?*

It's too expensive for the house. There aren't enough operas that employ a *Hochdramatischer* soprano unless she can switch hit and sing *Jugendlich* or a mezzo or something else instead. It's not worth their while.

*When did you realize you had a larger vocal instrument?*

I was told that from the very beginning. The choir master who heard me said, "You're a Wagnerian" before I knew what that meant.

*What technical vocal problems did you struggle with as a younger singer?*

It's hard to answer that question because at this point it's hard to distinguish between what I was taught as American vocal technique and what are vocal problems. A lot of what's considered normal American vocal technique sounds problematic to German ears.

*Can you give me some examples?*

Absolutely. Vowel shading...shading different vowels to get the sound that you want on a particular note sounds a like a vocal problem to German ears. Covering sounds like a vocal problem to German ears. Darkening and rounding the sound is a vocal problem. To them it sounds like the voice is impure.

*So how is German training different?*

Their aesthetic is different because they're working toward a different end-product. For a dramatic soprano, they're working toward a voice that is much more metallic than the average American voice. It has a different basic tongue position from the American voice. It gives a certain purity of tone that to an American ear can sound strident, but to a German ear it sounds calm.

*Do you mind telling me what that tongue position is?*

Absolutely flat.

*Does that cause problems with feeling like the breath is coming through too big of a space?*

Not for me.

*So just forward and flat?*

Yes. Putting one hand over the other hand, let the top hand represent the tongue, the bottom hand the floor of the mouth the tips of the fingers as the teeth. So flat and curled under at the front so that it presses on the floor of the mouth underneath the bottom teeth.

*It's like a bigger space in there.*

Yes.

*Was that a hard adjustment to make?*

I took me two and half years to get it right. I was told that was normal. Also, Americans, especially native English speakers, take a really long time to switch over. The tongue just has to retrain itself.

*What tools did you use to overcome any of the struggles you've had in the past?*

The American teachers would diagnose tongue and jaw tension but fix them by creating tongue and jaw tension in different places and in different ways. When I got to Germany I found a technique that worked for me. The teacher didn't so much approach it as eliminating tongue and jaw tension but as repositioning the muscles of the tongue and the jaw, making them work in different ways.

*What operatic repertoire felt the most comfortable to you as a young singer?*

I would say mezzo soprano repertoire like Orfeo. I was misidentified as a lyric mezzo for a long time and I was able to sing a lot of that music, but I wasn't able to sing it well. Once I started singing the larger repertoire the first thing that felt comfortable was the dramatic mezzo repertoire in the Wagner *Fach*. There were things that were right on the border line such as Ortrud. It felt really good.

*Is there a particular role that helped solidify your technique?*

I think every role that I've learned has helped with different aspects of my technique, but I have to say the exercises that I do from the German teacher are the things that solidified my technique. She has a series of eight exercises that work like weights and machines at the gym. They train the various muscles of the body to do what they need to do automatically so that you're never thinking, "Now I need to open my ribs and now I need to pull up my diaphragm and now I need to do this and now I need to do that." It goes automatically. That was the most helpful.

*Do you have those in any kind of written format or you just know them?*

I just know them. I've been doing them for three years now. They also take a long time to learn to do properly. If you just see them written out they won't make any sense.

*What are some arias that proved to be helpful in cementing your vocal technique?*

Again, the exercises were the things that cemented my technique and by the time I got to sing the arias, the technique had already been cemented. It was just a matter of using what I already had and deploying it in all its various possibilities.

*Do you still struggle with the same pedagogical problems as you did in the beginning?*

No, because of my solid technique. Again, it is the difference between American and German teachers. American teachers explain by using words and scientific ideas for what they want me to do. German teachers just say to do this exercise and it fixes the problem. They're not big into explaining. They're not big into telling you what's not working and what is going to work. That if you do the exercise what can happen and how you can make it better. They just say do this and you do it, and it's fixed. That's the end of the problem.

*Did you find any solutions to your problems through self-discovery?*

Absolutely, because of the way that I take lessons. I go over there for two, three, four weeks at a time and take as many lessons and coachings as I possibly can. When I come back home, I'm on my own for four months, five months, or if I'm lucky, three months. The first week I get back I'm still fresh from my lessons; therefore, I don't really have to think about being my own teacher. But then subtle changes start happening. New exercises I've been given start to take effect and the instrument doesn't line up exactly the way it had been lining up during the lessons in Germany and that's good. It means I've made a little bit of progress. But then I have to figure out on my own where I go from there. And so yes, I have had to be my own teacher and it's been wonderful.

*Can you give me some examples of the solutions and how you applied them?*

The solutions mostly involve sensations that are happening inside my body and matching the sensations to something I've heard my teacher mention. When I'm in Germany, I sit in on everybody's lessons. The beginners, the people who are singing in Bayreuth, everybody, and I get to hear solutions to problems that I've never even thought of. Sometimes the things that I hear will be stored in my mental rolodex and when I need them, they pop out and I can apply them. I wish I could be more concrete for you, but they are so particular to me that way.

*When did you feel your vocal technique settle?*

About six months ago.

*Did this change your repertoire?*

No, it confirmed my repertoire. I started lessons with Gundula June of 2013. By early 2014, we were agreeing that I was most likely a *Hochdramatischer*. The first thing that I sang in Germany was Kundry, which was not really something you're supposed to start with, but she knew it was a small company who needed a Kundry. All of a sudden, their Kundry dropped out. I had less than three months to learn the role. I already knew parts of it so it wasn't that hard, but I did it and I loved it. It felt right to me and it confirmed that the voice was headed in the direction that we thought it was going. I got the offer to cover Elektra in 2016, and we started working on Elektra's monologue. Gundula was a little skeptical but it worked. And that was the next bit of confirmation.

*How do you feel your voice changing as you get older?*

It's becoming more and more well-organized, more and more stable, and it's sounding more and more like a *Hochdramatischer*.

*Do you feel the quality of your voice has changed in the last five years?*

Of course, it has improved vastly.

*What are some adjectives that you have either heard from others or you feel like describe your vocal quality?*

It's no longer a hot mess. Other people describe my voice as very powerful, very well-trained, and very metallic. It's what my German teacher would call a noble metal and not an annoying, screeching metal. It's a kind of metal that will cut over an orchestra and then bloom at the back of the house.

*Do you feel like the changing qualities happen often?*

No, my voice has always been a version of what it is now. It has always had metal in it. It has always been very powerful. It has always enjoyed doing crazy jumps and leaps that are part of the whole *Hochdramatischer* repertoire. It just wasn't put together well enough. The technique wasn't solid enough for anybody to think, "Oh yeah, she could actually survive a whole *Hochdramatischer* role and live to sing another day."

*What role has had the biggest impact on your life until now?*

I don't think I can answer that question yet. I'm still too new to the profession.

*Tell me what roles you have sung.*

I sang a bunch of roles that have nothing to do with being a *Hochdramatischer*, which were really not useful. They were mostly discouraging experiences and yet I kept coming

back. The Kundry was really a turning point. It just fell into my lap and I learned it very quickly. When I performed it, it felt absolutely right.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

I can give you the German answer to that question. The answer is no. The German answer is that all voices need the same basic training but with a *Hochdramatischer*, you need to train her to be even stronger and even more stable. So, it's a question of degree. A lighter voice can get away with more instability in the voice. A lighter voice can get away with more things without destroying themselves, but in the German system, they aspire to all voices being set up in a very stable way with a good deal more metal than American voices and with a purer sound. That's true of all of the voice types.

*Do you feel comfortable suggesting a progression of roles for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

I don't mostly for two reasons. First of all, I'm not an experienced teacher. Second of all, my own progression of roles was zero to Kundry in two years. I'm not really helpful to anybody else.

*In summary, name the top three pedagogical issues you've had over the course of your career and the solutions for them.*

There are only two. I think they are universal among training dramatic sopranos and that's jaw tension and tongue tension. And again, part of that came from my trying to adjust my voice to an American style of training that it really didn't take to. The ideas of covering, darkening, rounding, and vowel shading all contributed to jaw and tongue tension. Switching over to German technique and German training has really resolved those issues. And they didn't get resolved by being told in scientific terms what to do and what not to do. It got solved the old-fashioned way. Here, do these exercises and call me in the morning, and it worked.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding a successful career?*

The obvious would be to find a teacher whose method works for you. Beyond that, learn to speak really good German. Not only because it's going to help you in your professional contacts but because it actually helps you sing the German repertoire more successfully. The German system works the best. The German vocal system works most efficiently if you're pronouncing all of your German vowels and consonants the right way. Not surprising right? Learn to speak German as idiomatically and as well as you can.

**Johanna Meier: phone interview on July 5, 2016**

*Would you briefly describe your singing career?*

Well, my career lasted about thirty-seven years. I made my professional debut at the New York City Opera in 1955 and I continued to sing with them for a number of years. I then began to do guest appearances both here and abroad. Later on, I went to the Metropolitan and I sang considerably throughout the world with all the major opera companies and most of the major orchestras. I was at the Metropolitan for a period of seven years, I believe. I finally retired in 1994.

*Can you describe the institution that you started in South Dakota?*

When I retired from singing I moved back here to my home in South Dakota. There is a small university here in our town and my husband and I decided it would be a good thing to start an institute here for a couple of weeks in the summer. We largely were considering young singers from our immediate area thinking that they might not have access to that kind of training. But as it turned out we had singers from all over the country and even from abroad. We did this for seventeen years and my faculty were largely former colleagues of mine. We had a two-week intensive program and a number of our young singers have gone on to very good careers.

*When did you realize you had a larger voice?*

I graduated from the Manhattan School of Music and I had a moderately large voice at that time. My first thought was to go to Germany and get repertoire experience in some of the smaller German houses. But when I went over I was consistently offered the heavier roles and they thought of me as a Wagnerian soprano. I was only twenty-one-years-old at the time and I said, "Maybe in fifteen years, but not now. This isn't the time." So, I returned to the United States and worked with smaller companies here. When I first went in to New York City Opera I sang a great deal of Mozart. I worked my way up very slowly and very carefully into the larger, heavier roles. Fortunately, I had teachers who respected this, and I think it was probably the best path to allow my voice to develop gradually.

*What technical vocal problems did you experience as a young singer?*

Well, I don't remember having a great many technical problems at all. When I first started to sing at the University of Miami I studied with a teacher who didn't stress technique. I was singing largely on natural voice. Then I went to the Metropolitan regional auditions in New Orleans and very fortunately I only got second place. I realized that the other singers were much farther advanced technically than I was. That was what led me to leaving the University of Miami to go to New York to seek a teacher who would work on technique.

*Could you describe the technique your New York teacher taught you once you made the move?*

The first teacher that I worked with concentrated on height of tone and that was something I was able to retain throughout. I think she established a very firm ground for me which allowed me to sing a very diverse repertoire. I sang a great deal of Mozart in the early years and I felt that it was a very good direction in which to go. Mozart had a great deal of long line singing with a fairly light orchestra. Gradually I worked into Strauss which also had long line singing with a larger orchestra. Eventually when I came into Wagner I was able to cope with that with a larger orchestra because of this height of tone. I didn't have what we call a *Hochdramatischer* voice. I was a lyric dramatic and I didn't ever attempt to sort of crash through the orchestra but rode on the top of it. I think that the height gave me the thrust that I needed for the larger dramatic roles.

*What operatic repertoire felt the most comfortable to you as a young singer?*

As I said I started out singing a great deal of Mozart. I also sang quite a varied lyric repertoire while I was at New York City Opera. I sang everything from *Louise* to *Turn of the Screw*, *La bohème*, and *Tosca*. I just sang a great deal of lighter music. Earlier on in my career I had also done *La Traviata* and then *Fledermaus*. As I say, I worked my way very gradually into heavier repertoire mostly through Strauss and eventually into the Wagnerian roles.

*Is there a role you felt helped solidify your technique?*

Well, it was probably *Ariadne auf Naxos*. That was a role which I first sang at the New York City Opera. I had also sung it in concert. It was also the role of my European debut in Rome and ultimately the role of my Metropolitan opera debut. It fit my voice very comfortably and had very good acting possibilities, which I enjoyed. So, I felt that it was very good for me all around.

*Do you have some arias that proved to be helpful to you as you prepared to sing the larger, dramatic roles?*

Well, I can't say so. I continued to do a diversity of roles. I feel that because I went back and forth early on and retained the flexibility in my voice it didn't allow me to groove down heavily, especially in the middle voice. I think that stood me in very good stead. I sang lighter roles almost throughout my career and then came eventually to roles like *Fidelio*, *Freischütz*, and some of the moderately heavy roles. But there wasn't a specific aria that I felt was helpful to me. Different ones presented different challenges.

*Do you recall having any pedagogical problems when you began to sing the Wagner, Verdi, and Strauss repertoire?*

No, I was very fortunate. I had several teachers in New York and I felt that each one of them was responsible for a certain development in my voice. The last teacher with whom I worked was Chloe Owen who had had an extensive career in Europe. She helped to



open my sound which gave me more confidence in Wagnerian roles. But I continued to always sing with the height of tone that my very first teacher started with me.

*Did you ever teach?*

I never taught singing. When I had students here at the Institute I taught body movement which I felt was being largely overlooked. Our program was too short to get into any vocal problems for the young singers. They were only here for a couple of weeks. So, what I tried to give them was stage technique, presence, acting, and the physical involvement of the entire body in singing rather than concentrating on their voices alone. But I never taught voice. I never wished to teach voice. I felt that I only wanted the responsibility of my own voice and not to be responsible for others.

*Did you notice some reoccurring pedagogical or technical issues during the program in the younger dramatic sopranos?*

Well, most of our students were college age or just getting out of college so they weren't that far developed in their own vocal categories. What I did notice more than vocal problems was a problem of commitment of application, of concentration, and the diversity of techniques they would need to rely on besides their vocal technique. Basically, they needed a general knowledge of taking responsibility for themselves and their progress and awakening to the fact that they needed to do more than learn some big arias.

*Did you notice your voice going through major changes as your career progressed?*

Well, probably only that I felt that I was getting a little bit more space to expand. But my basic technique as I say was started very early on and it was just a matter of opening the cavities a little bit more to increase the sound that came from the breath. But the basic singing technique basically stayed the same.

*Is there a role you have performed that you felt changed your life?*

Oh, probably Isolde. That was the role for which I became best known in later years. I was first offered the role when I was singing Tosca in Amsterdam and the director was Lotfi Mansouri. He was at that time the director of the Canadian Opera and he said, "What would you think about doing Isolde for me in a couple of years." I said, "Well, I've never spent any time studying it but if you would like to experiment with that I would be very interested to try." So, I did spend several years preparing it and ultimately that was the role with which I had the greatest success both abroad and in the United States. I did about twelve to fifteen different productions. Of course, I mainly worked in Bayreuth. I was the first American to ever sing Isolde in Bayreuth. I did sing it in England and throughout Europe and at the Metropolitan and elsewhere in this country.

*Did you find that there were different challenges when you would be singing a Verdi opera as opposed to Wagner or Strauss?*

No, not essentially. I sang somewhat of a variety of Verdi roles although I was not a Verdi specialist. I started out with *Traviata* but then after that I sang *Desdemona*, *Falstaff*, *Ballo in Maschera*, and *Trovatore*. I probably sang a half a dozen *Aidas*.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Yes, but only in how they approach the development of their voice. I think that there are too many young singers who have naturally big voices who immediately leap into heavy dramatic repertoire. I think that is not wise. Also, I think a great deal of dramatic singing is done too loud. I have been a judge now for the Metropolitan Regional auditions all over the country and I find that young singers are consistently coming in and just singing too loudly all the time. I remember when I was first working on *Isolde* I worked with the conductor and coach at Covent Garden and with Furtwangler who was kind of a Wagner specialist. In going over the score he said there are pages and pages of piano. It is not all loud. Wagner singing is not all loud and one needs to look at the markings, not just decibels. There's a great deal more involved in singing Wagner than singing loudly. Fortunately, when I sang it in Bayreuth Daniel Barenboim was the conductor. He was very much of the same mind and he allowed me to bring a great deal of lyricism to that role. So, I would say that the greatest challenge for dramatic voices is to time themselves properly so that they don't get into heavy repertoire too soon. When they do take on heavier roles they need to look for variety and dynamics and don't just think they need to sing everything loudly.

*Did you notice a difference singing in the theater at Bayreuth as opposed to other theaters that were not built specifically for Wagner's music?*

Well, there is a great deal of difference because in the theater in Bayreuth you don't hear your voice at all. I was forewarned by other singers there and, of course, the orchestra is largely underneath the stage. The blend of the voice and the orchestra takes place out in the hall, so you don't ever hear yourself as you do in some other theaters. The tendency is to come and feel like you have to blast your way through that. But, I was told in advance that that is not a good practice for that house. You have to sing the way you sing, and the proper mix will be made out in the house itself.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for a young dramatic soprano to study?*

I would always suggest Mozart as being an excellent study at any stage of development. I would also think that some of the Verdi operas would be good. Probably if one contemplates the German repertoire at all, I would think Strauss is a good jumping off point for going into Wagner. In Wagner there is *Meistersinger* and *Lohengrin*, both of

which are much more lyric roles. I would just caution against jumping into heavy repertoire too early.

*How much time would you allow yourself to study a role before you went into rehearsal?*

Well, generally contracts are made several years in advance. If it was a new role I would have that amount of time to prepare it. I didn't ever prepare any big role quickly. I always did take time with it both musically and vocally. I think that the longer one has to work a role into the voice and to study its details the better off you are.

*Do you have any advice that you would give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

The use of language is very, very important, especially if you are contemplating singing abroad at all. I was basically by myself most of the years that I traveled and sang around the world. I did not travel with my husband or with a companion, and so I had to deal with a lot of business and every day affairs in different countries. You need to have a good working knowledge of the language. Also, I think you need to have a fair business sense so that you can make wise business decisions. You need to keep yourself in very good health. It's not a social career. I think you have to be comfortable with being by yourself a great deal of the time. Creative solitude is a very important factor. When you are singing, you have to curtail social life a great deal. You concentrate on the work at hand, and that means that you're going to spend many hours by yourself. You just have to be accustomed and be able to cope with that and keep yourself in even balance.

*Is there anything else that you would like to offer?*

Well, I think you want to look for the very best coaches you can get. Find somebody who is familiar with the repertoire. Strangely enough, when I went to the Metropolitan, there were older coaches there who had worked with Flagstad. I discovered that Flagstad had taken many cuts in her roles which we could not now take in singing Wagner. So, I think your stamina and your vocal strength are very important. But, also find a good coach who will bring out the best musically for you.

*Did you see the expectation of opera singers change over the decades that you sang?*

To a certain extent, yes. I find that young singers now are much more eager for quick success and they will jump into repertoire that perhaps they shouldn't. Also, young singers who are not so knowledgeable about the business of opera will expect that because they can sing a couple of arias very well that their next step is the stage at the Metropolitan. I think that there is a lot of groundwork that has to be done first, and I think it is very important to be at ease and comfortable and well-prepared before you tackle major auditions. Don't expect that everything is going to work because sometimes it doesn't even with the best of intentions. I remember an audition that I did for Fort Worth early on when I was still at New York City Opera. They were planning to do

*Meistersinger* and I thought that was perfect. So, I went in and auditioned with the aria from *Meistersinger* and the Intendant said, "Well, we understand you sing a lot of Mozart now. Would you sing us some Mozart?" So, I sang "Non mi dir." And then he said, "Do you have anything in Italian?" So, I sang "Vissi, d'arte." And he said, "You know you're really an Italianate soprano" and they didn't hire me for anything. And so, you have to kind of be prepared to deal with those kinds of situations and just carry on doing what you're doing with good faith that your work will be recognized.

### **Marjorie Owens: Skype interview on July 7, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your vocal journey.*

Well, I always came up through choruses in middle school and high school. But I really got into opera when I began attending a Governor's Magnet School for the Arts in Virginia. It is located in the Tidewater area from Norfolk and Chesapeake. So, I ended up in the vocal program there in high school. The man who ran the program, Allen Fisher, is a character tenor and opera is his life. So, the entire vocal program then turned into an opera program and I knew nothing about it. I kind of wanted to do musicals but I did on a report on Maria Callas and that was pretty much it. Ever since then I was obsessed.

*Briefly describe your career in its current stage.*

Well, I have been a Fest singer in Germany at the *Semperoper* in Dresden. I was doing lots of really fun stuff over there. They allowed me the time and I was able to get a lot of experience doing a lot of lead roles over there. I did that for about four seasons and now I've been loosed on the world. I just made my Met debut last January as Aida.

*Wow, what a big role to have your Met debut.*

It was my Met debut and my role debut as well.

*Do you know that someone said to me, "Never debut a role at the Met. Do it somewhere else first." Maybe Johanna Meier said that to me in her interview. I'm not sure. You're brave.*

It's very smart words. There's something wrong with me. But how do you say no? I've never been able to not sing a role. I had covered Aida there many years ago when I was about twenty-five. So, I knew it and I coached it. So, I gave it a shot. But other than that, I just got out of St. Louis. This has been my English season. I just did *Ariadne* in English at Opera Theater St. Louis. And before that I did my first *Norma* with ENO in English. So, I'm ready to get back into German again.

*Where do you see yourself in five years?*

I am contracted for my first *Turandot* in two or three years. It is a little early in my frame of mind. That's something I thought I would tackle a little later on. I want it so I'm going to try it and see how it feels.

*Out of curiosity, did you enjoy Festing or do you think you like Guesting better?*

The money is much better when you're guesting but I needed a *Fest* like that because I grew up as a professional young artist. I did Houston right out of my bachelor's. I was twenty-two. I did that for four years then I went to Chicago and I did their young artist program for two years. Then the Met hired me to cover a lot. So, I just really only covered a lot of roles and I wasn't able to put a lot of them on my resume as experience. I needed to try out a bunch of roles relatively quickly so the *Semperoper* was perfect. My boss was a wonderful guy and he knew exactly what I wanted and he was absolutely willing to give it to me. He let me pick my roles. He let me pick the dates. He would release me whenever something great came up. I could go out and guest in other places. It was a dream contract.

*When did you realize you had a larger voice?*

I always knew. When I was in tenth or eleventh grade in high school I was auditioning for the All-State choir. I had to go and audition and they wouldn't let me in because they said I was trying to sound like a woman too much. I think it was because I had vibrato. I'm not entirely sure what that meant. People have run into some issues trying to use me in choral settings and that kind of thing. I went to Baylor which is in Waco, TX, just purely for the teacher. But it's a big choir school so I had to sing in their choirs. It took some getting used to.

*Can you talk about the technical vocal problems you struggled with as a young singer?*

How young?

*I'm going to say in your twenties.*

Okay. I was very lucky because I knew exactly who I wanted to study with. A lot of my high school friends were older and had graduated. They had gone to this man and would come back and sing alumni concerts and they sounded phenomenal. Their problems were fixed so I knew I needed a good technique because I loved the repertoire. I was gaining lots of knowledge. I was listening to every singer I could get my hands on, but I didn't have the technique for it. So, I went to this guy and he's still my teacher. His name is Dr. John Vencura. He's retired now, mostly. He started me off as a mezzo for a while because I was singing in falsetto a lot when I was young. So, I had to figure out how to sing with my top, not the falsetto. So, we started with mezzo and went from there. That was challenging but we built it up. The biggest issue I had in my twenties was singing too loudly. Everyone was saying, "Oh wow, you're such a large voice. You must be a

dramatic soprano.” I was like, “Oh, I must be.” So, I would try and sing as loud as I could, as open as I could, and it was detrimental, obviously.

*What are some tools your teacher gave you to overcome your technical problems?*

Well, he basically built me from the ground up. He's incredibly technical and very pedagogical. He likes explaining the mechanism and showing exactly what is happening. He basically explained very low breathing, nothing hostile, nothing like that. No tension is present in the tongue or anything like that. He taught me how to raise my soft palate. We didn't work a lot of positions mouth-wise. Everything always came back to breath. If something felt hard or difficult, you always go back to the breath and it always solved it.

*What operatic repertoire felt the most comfortable to you in your twenties?*

I wouldn't say Verdi. I did cover Leonora in *Trovatore* but it didn't sit right. It was tough, but it got easier as I grew a little. In my early twenties I did a lot of Mozart. My favorite is Strauss. Wagner is lovely, but Strauss is where my heart is.

*What operatic repertoire feels the best to you now in your mid-thirties?*

Strauss. You know I really haven't come across a lot of stuff that feels bad. There's only one or two roles that I tried out and thought it was a terrible idea. One of those is *Madama Butterfly*. I did that a couple of times and I felt like it took a year off my life each time. She never leaves the stage. She just stays on and sings in her *passaggio* the entire time. I'm happy to go watch someone else sing it. But for me, by the end of the night it wasn't worth it for me for what I got out of it. A lot of the Verdi was a little too low such as the climactic parts in *Aida*. I tried *Un Ballo in Maschera* and ran into the same thing. It was just something to put off for later. Honestly, I just have one thing I always try and use in my career. That is to sing as light as possible for as long as possible. I like to stay right on the cusp of my *Fach*.

*Is there a role that you feel solidified your technique?*

It's probably Ariadne. I've done maybe five productions now. So, it's the one I've done the most. I love it dearly. It has some low parts but also contains some high moments. It is like a smorgasbord of technique right there.

*What are some arias that proved to be helpful in cementing your vocal technique?*

Good question. I used to love singing “Dich teure Halle.” It taught me not to scream all the time. It's this big, fun, joyful aria and it taught me not to go overboard. I try and sing it *mezzo forte* the entire time. That was enough. People were fine with that. People always say to sing on the principle and not the interest. Those are words to live by, especially as a dramatic soprano. It's not the sheer size of your voice. It's the endurance you have to build up for the stuff we do.

*Do you still struggle with the same pedagogical problems you had when you were younger?*

I'm pretty solid with my technique. That's why I do idiotic things like debut roles at the Met. There was a time when I was in Dresden I dropped about 100 pounds. I did it so slowly and I did it while constantly singing on a *Fest* contract. So, the transformation just evolved rather than having a sudden change.

*Have you fixed technical issues through self-discovery?*

You know, I could try and get back to DC to my teacher once or twice a year for a tune up ever since I was in my late twenties. But by this point I can't go back to a teacher. I have to be able to fix it myself as a professional singer. That's what's required of you. You have to have a technique that's solid enough that if you run into some issues you need to be able to figure out what's going on; or you have people that you trust that can listen to you. I have a couple of friends that I will ask to listen and tell me what's wrong. The same thing happens with coaches. They can be very, very helpful especially if it's somebody you trust and you've worked with for a while.

*When did you feel your vocal technique settle?*

I don't know if it's technique or just age. By my mid-twenties I was pretty set because I got started so young. I knew pretty much what I wanted, and I had to fight through a lot of teachers that were forced on me that did not help at all. That's one of the problems in a young artist's program. They make you study with their teacher, so I knew what was working for me and what wasn't because I had to listen to so many different voices from teachers and coaches. It turned out to be a good thing because when you coach and take from so many different people, you're able to form your own language. You're able to translate what they're saying into something that works for you. I just had the one teacher, so I didn't know any differently. It was a rough start in Houston when all of a sudden I was hearing from all these people and I wasn't familiar with their language.

*How do you feel your voice has changed in your thirties from your twenties?*

That's a good question. It's definitely more stable now. I have a bit more of a range that I'm happy to use. It's a lot more about the soft singing than it is about the loud. I was always able to sing loud. That's not my issue. Being heard was never an issue for me. How softly can I sing without going off the voice? I don't want to do that. My thirties are basically about finding where that is.

*Do you feel like the quality of your voice has changed?*

No. I always sound young no matter what I sound like. I have a young timbre that I'm stuck with. I wouldn't mind having a more mature sound sometimes. I've gotten feedback

to that extent that it will come in later. They always say it's so fresh and young. I wouldn't mind a little more heft.

*What role changed your life the most and why?*

I would say Leonora in *Trovatore*. It was rough in the beginning and I thought I was never going to be able to sing it. I kept asking myself, "why was I covering this?" It was so hard. But eventually I figured it out. It took a lot of singing through it. I started figuring out exactly what I was doing wrong. I figured out how to approach the top in the aria. You have to make a choice. And I've sung it several times now and each time it's always felt different but better. And it's enabled me to play with my top a lot more than I used to be able to.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Not really. My teacher never took a different technical approach with me. It's always been about healthy sound and healthy breathing. He knew I would need time. The only thing that should change with larger voices is you need to be able to give them more time. You can't rush them. You can't try and force them to be something they're not. They're going to keep growing. So, you need a teacher that is going to recognize that and have patience.

*Could you suggest a progression of roles for young dramatic sopranos to study while preparing for the bigger repertoire?*

I know it's cliché but I'm always going to say Mozart. Whenever I go back to Mozart it's basically brushing up on my technique all over again. He's got everything in there you need to be able to do well. A lot of the verismo stuff you can get away with a bag of tricks. You can get away with horrifying technique and still make an impact whereas you can't with Mozart. You've got to be able to sing well. I would always go back to Mozart. I would go to Strauss for the breath. There's just so much breath involved. I would tell them to try out some of the lighter roles in Wagner. A lot of the lighter stuff I tried in Dresden. I did Elisabeth, Elsa, and Senta. It takes a certain style with Wagner. It's not so much about making beautiful music. I found out it's a lot more declamatory. It's very text driven.

*Name the top three pedagogical issues you've had over the course of your career and their solutions.*

At first, I was always trying to push. That was annoying. I had to constantly have people sort of slap me on the hand and tell me to stop and calm down. Stop pushing. Breathe. I also had a lot of neck tension. My head would start to shake when I was in my early twenties because there was so much tension. Again, that came down to breath. My response to fix it is always going to be breath. You have to remember to breathe correctly



to fix any kind of tension. I also split resonated a lot. Instead of having the breath and the sound come from my mouth, I would try and put it in the mask. Instead of doing that I would put it into my nose. It would become kind of nasal. So, it cut the sound in half which was the problem. That was why I was pushing because I wanted to sound louder. This also clamps down and cuts the sound as well. So, it took a lot of plugging my nose trying to get the resonance in one place. It is fixed with breath and placement.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

First, I would say to any young singer trying to have an excellent career that it is time and luck and talent. This is especially true for dramatic sopranos. Don't go big early. There's no point to it. Everyone will want you to. They tried to get me to sing *Turandot* when I was twenty-three in Houston and that was hard. I thought they were crazy, but they seemed sure I could do it. But I didn't want to. I wasn't ready for it. So, you have to be able to say no to things even if it kills you. Know your limitations. Know what you do well. Honestly, I thought about Europe for a long time. I didn't really want to go over to Germany. I like America. I like the states. I like air-conditioning and ice. So, I didn't want to go over. Finally, it dawned on me that if I was going to get the kind of experience I wanted I'd have to go over, and I loved it. I don't regret it for a minute. You hear horror stories all the time about *Fest* contracts in different places, but mine was wonderful. I would recommend that.

*Did you speak German fluently before you went?*

No. I didn't speak German at all before I went. I took French in school and I took Russian. I was singing mostly Italian. But I showed up and started to figure it out. My German is still terrible. It's not great. It's like a five-year-old's German. I can survive. I should have. I would recommend as many languages as possible. Study as much as you can for German or Italian or French, especially if you want an international career. You will need it. In international houses the language of the opera is the language you will be rehearsing in. I showed up in Paris to do a *Walküre* and I figured it would be French, but it was all German. Brush up on the language. It is very important.

*Is there anything else that you'd like to offer regarding this topic?*

No. You were very thorough. Just remember to not accept stuff you can't sing. Everyone does it. You see it everywhere. People are burning out. If you can't sing it, then don't. Know what you sing well. If you think you won't be able to do it technically then don't sing it. Why would you? I've run into that a lot, and it's always just amazed me. Then people will blame everyone but the singer. It has always surprised me because it's the singer's fault. You need to know yourself. In this profession it is up to you to know what you can and can't do.

**Jane Eaglen: phone interview on July 19, 2016**

*Would you briefly describe how you started singing opera?*

Sure. I started off my life as a pianist and I had done a lot of piano during high school. So, my current teacher said that I should have voice lessons for a year. I started singing and decided to apply to the Geneva College to sing rather than to do piano, which was my original intention. I began working with the same teacher that I have now. I've had one teacher since the time I was eighteen and I've progressed from there.

*Describe how your opera career looked when you were at your busiest.*

I was basically singing all the time, pretty much for twenty-five years, I would say. Maybe a little longer judging by my first contract. After about three or four years on contract I then started singing freelance and I basically was full eight and a half to nine months every year for about twenty-five, thirty years.

*What does your career look like now?*

I haven't retired. I still sing. I have a concert coming up next week. But, I mainly teach and am now on the full-time faculty at New England Conservatory. It was something I've always wanted to do. Because I've had one teacher and with the career I've had I've learned an awful lot along the way. It was definitely a part of my plan from very early on that I wanted to teach. And honestly, with traveling and the pressure of singing huge roles, at a certain point I decided I wanted to choose the things I wanted to do as far as singing is concerned and concentrate more on the teaching.

*When did you realize you had a larger voice?*

My teacher told me two weeks after starting lessons with me that one day I would sing Brünnhilde and Norma. That was nothing I was familiar with. He said to go listen to the operas. I really didn't come from a musical background. I certainly didn't come from a background that knew anything about singing or opera. My background was piano and more contemporary music. I became aware of the repertoire and basically just followed my teacher's guidelines.

*What technical or pedagogical problems did you struggle with as a young singer before age thirty?*

I don't think I actually struggled particularly with anything. When I was eighteen my teacher gave me Sieglinde's aria to sing. He said that it's much easier to learn how to sing using your voice as it needs to be used. In other words, using my voice as it was naturally, never pushing but certainly not ever holding back which can actually be more damaging for young voices to reach their actual level. He was not worried by the fact that I was eighteen, nineteen and I had a bigger sound than some singers. He just let me kind of sing with that voice and grow and develop to figure out my technique. The top of my voice was the last part of the voice to come which was probably mostly in my late

twenties when my vocals evened out. But I think that's often the case with bigger voices. But, you know, the voice tends to have a strong middle and we have to work the top a little bit. But he taught me a certain way to sing technically correct and then my mind developed and my muscles developed and so on. Everything sort of fell into place without me having to change the way I sang anything.

*What operatic repertoire were you singing in your twenties and early thirties?*

I sang a lot of First Ladies and Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*. When I was at San Francisco I also sang Donna Elvira and *Maria Stuarda*. I sang Butterfly. I sang Mimi. I sang Donna Anna toward the end of that time and that was the role that stayed with me for a long time. I sang Fiordiligi. So, it's a very wide-ranging repertoire.

*Is there a particular role you felt help solidify your technique as you began singing professionally?*

Not really, honestly. I think technique is something which develops and grows throughout whatever you're singing. I wouldn't say there's one thing that I felt as if I now had it figured out. Everything just develops. There's always new things to find even in roles you revisit after several years. So, I wouldn't say there was any particular role that I felt solidified anything.

*Were there particular arias that you felt were good study arias as you began your career?*

I started off auditioning with few arias, really. I sang Santuzza's aria from *Cavalleria* and "Du bist der Lenz" from *Die Walküre* and they were both very short arias. Then I kind of jokingly said, "My career is based on those short six minutes of music." When I was in my early twenties before the contract was on I didn't really have a top much above that. These arias showed the kind of repertoire that I was going to sing without me actually having to sing any of the high notes that I didn't really feel comfortable with. I had them, but they just weren't sort of in line with the rest of my voice.

*Describe some of the solutions either you discovered or your teacher gave you to help bring in the top to match the middle.*

I just had to wait to get older, basically. I think one thing that helped me in teaching younger voices is that people don't realize you just have to wait. Things don't happen when you want them to. They happen when they're ready. After Brünnhilde at the age of thirty I felt quite young starting off with the role. I mean, I'm talking about a top C coming in probably when I was about twenty-eight or thirty. Thirty isn't that late for a dramatic voice, but I started my professional career at twenty-three. You know, it was a few years after I had been earning my living singing that the very top came in with the rest of my voice.

*Regarding the techniques that you worked through when you were in your twenties as you were building your technique, were there any things you had to keep working on as your career kept going or as you became older? Did things just settle more?*

I think things just settled, really. Having had one teacher, as well, made me very sensitive to what I was working on. I think he very much talked about support and breath. I mean, that's what I believe singing is all about. I think you should keep working on those things. There's no magic wand. There's no one thing that you can say to somebody to make things work. It's a long process. I firmly believe in a base of support and so it is from that we have to develop so the breath is strong and you can do the *bel canto* repertoire, the coloratura passages, and so on. Technique is to allow you to do the things you want as an artist, I believe. And so, you need to take control of your voice in every way with the music you are performing.

*When did you feel vocally settled within your professional career?*

I think everything sort of settled down when I was in my early thirties. But, you know, there was never a moment when I went, "Oh, I've figured it all out. Everything is set now." It was always a work in progress. There were times I sort of felt I knew what I was doing. I would know if I was doing well, but you have to challenge yourself and I certainly did. I was always sort of trying with something else and trying for something more and just sort of pushing myself through what I did.

*How did your repertoire change in your thirties?*

I continued singing Donna Anna. That was my Met debut and in Vienna and Italy, as well. I still sang Norma, through all those kinds of coloratura roles. But gradually as I got to be doing more of the Wagner and Isolde and Brünnhilde particularly it kind of just developed. That was what I particularly loved to sing. And so, the choices were a little bit more limited. I mean, I think it's something that a lot of people that are hiring singers don't believe that you could sing Donna Anna and Brünnhilde on the same day when, in fact, I think you should be able to. I think Wagner wrote trills for Ortrud and Brünnhilde so he clearly required a voice that moves. And so, I always approach Brünnhilde like Donna Anna and vice versa because I think you should be able to do those things all at the same time. You should seek out flexibility. People tend not to ask for you to do those things once you get into the heavier repertoire.

*As you progressed and got older, did you feel the quality of your voice changed?*

Not really. I think it filled out a little bit more generally but not really. I think that's probably not something that I can comment on, you know. I don't hear myself like others do. But certainly, the feeling that I have in my body when I'm singing has stayed the same.

*Do you have a role that you felt changed your life?*

I don't know if a role changed my life. I mean, Brünnhilde has always felt that that was kind of my role. Something about the character appealed to me so easily, as well as the music. I just love that character. My first Ring Cycle in Chicago was a very important moment. My Isolde with the Seattle Company was also very big. That is where I met my husband, so in that case it was life changing.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Not really, no. A voice is a voice. I like to teach light sopranos down to basses. I think there are certain things that are slightly different. I think bigger voices of all types tend to have more resonance going on in their head that they're aware of and feel that sort of buzzing sometimes. And if a teacher hasn't ever felt that it's sometimes hard for them to know how that feels and how the orchestra plays into it. Obviously, style is different and how you interpret things, different colors that you need to make, and so on. I don't believe it's any different. I think you just have to allow a bigger voice time to develop and become what that voice needs to be. You can't expect a dramatic soprano to be ready at twenty-two to perform.

*Do you have a progression of roles that you would suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

I'm not a big believer in learning an entire role and then trying to sing it. Learn the aria for sure and sing through the role, but it might be frustrating to learn the whole thing. I think you can only achieve so much. I think if you're heading toward a dramatic repertoire some of the lighter *Jugendlich dramatischer* literature, like Elsa, is something good for the voice. Every single voice is different. Some voices work well going through some Italian repertoire such as Verdi's *Ballo*. Some just don't really want to spend time in the scores. I certainly try when I'm working with young dramatic sopranos to test them on what their voice can do and work on the things that help them develop the top of the voice. Again, I take them through a progression, but it is hard to generalize.

*As a teacher can you name the top three pedagogical issues you are hearing among the sopranos in your studio when they come to you?*

They are being told at some point in their lives that they sing too loud and so a lot of bigger voices try to sing quietly. But then to do so they often get bored and that can get much more tiring and damaging than singing too loud. So that's a big issue I have. A lot of people come in just being kind of almost afraid because of the size of their voice. Therefore, there is an awfully big issue to get to their natural voice. They should always sing what is their most comfortable level and that's a big issue I've come across. I think more support can always happen and the bigger the voice the muscles really need to work to support the breath and so on. Those are two of the issues that crop up. The other thing

that happens apart from the under-singing with a big voice soprano is jaw tension. All those kinds of things can happen with any voice.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Patience is huge to start with. You need a larger level of patience as a bigger voice. There aren't a lot of opportunities in a young artist program. They want singers who can blend in on the mainstage. It's hard to do that with a larger voice. So, I think patience is a huge thing. You just have to work hard at every aspect of your art and your craft. It is more difficult these days. I think the more prepared you are, especially with languages, the more success and fun you will have. I think the main difference with a bigger voice is that you have to wait a little while.

*Is there anything you feel like I left out regarding this topic?*

I don't think so. I think the main issue is breath and support. You just have to wait for the voice. It is important as a teacher not to get in the way of the singer. Sometimes we just need to trust the singers. Every voice is different and should be approached differently.

### **Rachel Willis-Sørensen: Skype interview on July 21, 2016**

*Tell me how you got into singing opera.*

When I was nearly seventeen I started a group voice class for classical singing. I was incredibly arrogant. I thought that I knew exactly what I was doing and I didn't need any help. What could a teacher possibly tell me? I was singing all my pop music and Broadway musicals screaming my way through. I lost my voice once a week. Then I took this group voice class. One day, the teacher was warming me up and she just went higher and higher until I couldn't scream in my pop voice anymore. I had to switch into my upper register. She pointed out that that was my real voice. This is where I should be singing. Then she called me that night and she said, "I'm so impressed and surprised by the sound you made up that high and I think you should consider classical music. Do you know anything about it?" I knew nothing. I had no exposure at all. So, she started lending me these recordings and I was obsessed with coloraturas. I really wanted to be a coloratura so bad because it was so flashy and I'm not. She taught me privately then for my last year of high school and then I went on to college and studied it. I just fell in love with it. The more I listened the more I realized it was such a supreme art form. I listened to a lot of Placido Domingo and felt like I belonged in this place. Opera is such a special place. It provides such a different thing. The rest of the world is saying a different message. Anyway, that's what I thought at the time. So, I got involved and I really loved it and have loved it ever since.

*Describe what your career looks like currently.*

I did a young artist's program from 2009 to 2011. I have been a fully-fledged artist since the fall of 2011. So, this is the completion of my fifth year of this. I almost sang Mozart exclusively for the first five years. I'm trying to hold on to that as long as possible even though I consider it really challenging. I just did my role debut as Elsa in *Lohengrin* in Berlin this last season and it was such a different experience. I also sang Eva in *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. It was much more suited to my voice naturally. There's not as much effort involved in trying to keep everything small. Small is the wrong word. Delicate is a better word. In Mozart, the onsets and the cut offs have to be acutely stylized and it's challenging. But, I think it's worth it. For instance, I was singing performances of Elsa. Between them there were two weeks and I flew from Berlin to New York to start rehearsal for the *Marriage of Figaro*. So, I sang Mozart for these two weeks and the second performance of Elsa went so well compared to the first one. I was just in a good place vocally, so it turned out to be great. Singing Mozart teaches you a lot about control and breath support. I think it's funny that those long lines are so sing-able and singing Wagner is so glorious, but you can hurt yourself if you don't know your limits. I think that's where I am. I'm in the middle trying to determine where my limits are exactly.

*So, you're singing professionally in houses in Germany and in the States?*

Yes, I sing in all the big theaters. Next season I have two new productions at the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden and I sing at the Met and the Vienna State Opera. I just did two shows there for the first time last season. I did San Francisco Opera. I'm singing in Rome consistently with the orchestra with Tony Papano. I'm doing some concert work and I'm about to go to Milwaukee and sing Strauss' "Four Last Songs" and a concert performance of the *Marriage of Figaro*. I'm predominantly doing opera, but I also have concert work in every calendar year. That's good to have. Sometimes a brief gig is better than a long one in my circumstance. I have twins that just turned one and I have a daughter turning 3 in a couple of weeks so it's kind of crazy. So, if something is longer than two weeks my children and my husband come with me. He's a writer so he can do it from the road.

*Where do you see yourself in five to ten years with your career?*

It's such a tough call. I do feel there is this pressure to go into big repertoire as fast as possible. I'm trying to hold off on that. I was already offered Sieglinde a few times at big houses. I don't even want to sing it at a small house yet. I just turned 32 so it's hard to put the brakes on when people are offering big flashy things. Actually, it's funny. I had a film offer to sing Senta in *Flying Dutchman* with Bryn Terfel. It was a huge deal. It was such an accolade. I was very excited about it but also terrified. They kept saying they wanted me to lose weight. So, I got a trainer and lost some weight, but it's never enough. Also, the stress of it was making me crazy. It turned out that they fundraised one million euros too little to do the project because it was very ambitious. They were going to broadcast it live to cinemas all over the world, but we were going to perform it at a venue ten

kilometers away from the orchestra and have ear pieces and watch the conductor on an Ipad. It was a crazy idea. They needed an extra million euros, so they scrapped the project and I was just relieved because I think it would have been too soon. I would have been 29 at the filming and Senta is a big role. I'm probably not going to end up being a Brünnhilde. I don't even know how dramatic my voice ultimately is. I think I have a biggish voice but it's probably more *Jugendlicher dramatischer* at its biggest. I don't know exactly what will happen to me in five to ten years. Having twins significantly altered my voice and right now I'm kind of undergoing a re-haul of my technique. So, I've started taking a weekly lesson with my teacher again which I haven't done in years. My voice is sitting in a different way, but I had twins and that's a huge physical change. I need to figure it out again. I'm finding that I have to think much more about my singing than I did a year and a half ago.

*When did you realize you had a larger vocal instrument?*

I noticed when I started taking voice lessons with Elaine Scherperel. She taught me and just told me I had a bigger voice. She said she thought I would sing Wagner one day. I remember I didn't even know what that meant. So, I went to the library and tried to get a recording of something Wagner and I checked out *Siegfried*. It's funny because I think that knowledge can disadvantage you. You'll sing too big. You won't believe in the smallness. Listen to people like Kirsten Flagstad, who is my favorite recorded dramatic soprano. She would sing on the softest end of her dynamic safely all the time and she had a relaxed voice. Birgit Nilsson did as well. Everything is relaxed without tension. It's very loud but she's not trying to be big. Birgit Nilsson is something else entirely. That's the biggest voice that ever was. Kirsten Flagstad had this big, huge, dramatic instrument but she always sang with ease. I think that's something I've struggled with because I thought for a long time that the greatest thing I had to offer was loud and big, which is not true. Anyone can sing loud. A tiny voice can sing loud. But a voice with color and richness is amazing especially if you sing quietly with it. You don't always want to give them the top end of your dynamic. That was very hard for me to learn. Sometimes I have to go back to the basics and remind myself that my voice really isn't that big. When I did my first big Wagner role in San Francisco as Eva in *Meistersinger* I noticed that I had the smallest voice in the cast. So, there I was, thinking I have such a good voice, then it turned out there's some real fog horns out there you can't compete with. If you think that you have biggest voice in the room, then you know it's just a way to shoot yourself in the foot. Sing comfortably and try to avoid fulfilling the expectations you perceive other people have for you. It's much more important to make art and to sing beautifully. Remember that you're the person in the room who knows how to sing. Sometimes people with their clipboards and their commentary don't realize they are getting in the way. You can be over-criticized. It's hard for them to not understand that it's a personal experience for you as a singer. You're interacting with the information in a personal way. Anyway, it's complicated. You are the one responsible for the singing.

*Can you talk about technical and pedagogical problems you've had this far into your career?*



I used to have a heavy rasp in my speaking voice. I was always told I was too loud, so to counter that I started pushing the voice down to take out the resonance. So, I had like this thick rasp that was not great. I really struggled with pushing. Right now, I'm struggling with connecting to the support at all times. I think it's physical because of having twins. My abs went all to heck and I have to reclaim them. My voice and my abs are connected in a different way than they used to be. I'm having to think a lot more about support than I used to. It used to happen naturally. I could sing long phrases without trying. But now, I have to think a lot about support. I would say placement for me was a huge game changer, especially when I realized that deeper is brighter. I used to think that to get a bright placement you had to place the voice all the way forward to get the voice out of the throat. That never worked for me. It made me tense. When I realized that lifting the soft palate was how to get out of the throat then the tension started going away. If you go up and back instead of forward and out, then you get a more rounded sound anyway. Your tongue should be arched high, in my opinion. There's different schools of thought. So, in my world, you arch the tongue high and the space is between the tongue and the second pharynx. You have your buccal pharynx and your oral pharynx. That's where I need to be resonating. That helped me so much when I figured that out.

*What are some other tools that you use to solve these technical problems?*

Often, I sit down. On a hard phrase, I'll lift my feet and hold them up in the air. I lift them higher if I need to be more engaged. Also, I did realize something very recently that was a game changer for me. I realized that I started singing in this presentational way. My placement was too far forward and I was tense. I was very involved in the jaw. Then, I had a voice lesson and my teacher said, "you need to get into your sternum." He talks about his sternum a lot. It is always having a thread of chest even in high notes. This is another way of thinking about support. Then it occurred to me that when you're singing in this way, like I'm trying to please you, I want you to like what I'm doing. I'm going to defect back to perfection. By doing this, you're cutting off a lot of what you have to offer. You get a much less positive reaction than when you sing from your heart. When you meditate or when you pray you go inside into yourself. That's where your singing should come from. Anyway, it made such a difference to me and now when I'm finding that I'm struggling with the phrase, I try to see if I can sing it from an internal place instead of this external presentational way. How can it be more intimate in coming from my sternum, and it helps every single time.

*Would you say the Mozart repertoire is what you have felt the most comfortable singing?*

It's very challenging for me. The easiest thing I ever sang is Mimi in *La Bohème*. I did it in Dresden. I hope to sing it again, but I don't think people think of me as that at all. It's very lyrical. It was like a voice lesson. I used to think Mozart was so clean. Puccini is the opposite. I get to sing with so much blood in the voice using *portamenti*. It's fabulous singing. It felt great to sing that piece. But, that's not really my *Fach*. I used to think that the easiest thing for you is what your *Fach* is, but I don't think that's true. Every

composer has different challenges. Ultimately, you're going to sing what you're hired to sing. You need to balance and do what you can. Listen to your manager. You're going to have to sing what you're paid to sing. People will have a perception of you and what sort of niche you fill for them and what sort of problem you can solve. That's where you're going to have to go.

*Is there a role you've done so far that you felt help solidify your technique?*

Mimi got me to be free. My technique was helped by singing Vitellia in *Clemenza di Tito* by Mozart. It's very low and very high. I had to stretch for it. Just a couple of months ago, I sang the *Mahler Eighth* for the first time and it was hugely helpful. I think I had twenty high C's and I'm not a high singer. So, that was hard. I was nervous, but it was very helpful. Having to do it sort of forced me to figure out how to do it.

*What are some arias that have been helpful in cementing your vocal technique?*

“Dove sono” in Marriage of Figaro is great. Also, “Dich teure Halle” helped me a lot. The phrases are long and the dynamic range is huge. I felt like I had something worthwhile to say with it. That was helpful. I would also say Elsa's aria “Einsam in trüben Tagen” helped me a lot. Oh, and “Come scoglio” and “Per, pieta” from *Così* forced me to learn new things. I couldn't do the triplets in “Come scoglio.” I had to work so hard and then when I figured it out it was helpful.

*Do you feel like you still struggle with some of the same pedagogical problems that you did as a younger singer?*

No. No, it's always a new beast. Mine is totally changing. I would say for a long time it was my rasp and my inability to phonate with efficiency. Then I figured out onsets. Cutoffs need to be clean instead of sloppy. So, I have to get back to a place where I can staccato cleanly. That's hard to do. Some people say when you're hauling around so much voice it's impossible, but I don't believe that. I think you need all the tools in your toolbox. I don't have the biggest voice in the world, so I can't just get by on being a foghorn. I need finesse and I think that's good advice for everyone. Kirsten Flagstad had this huge voice, but she had so much finesse. She was so capable of every kind of dynamic and articulation. That's what is required of us. If you want to tell the story vocally that needs to be told in this exquisite music, you have to hold yourself to a high standard of technique. That's the way to get hired. People who are listening to singers want to give them a job. They want to be transported. They want to have a good experience. They really want you to have the capacity to say with your voice what needs to be said in the music.

*What are some solutions that your teachers have offered you in the past when you've had technical issues during lessons?*

Slide down a door on your back for a high note. Stroke the sternum and sing into the sternum. I have a teacher who makes you put a walnut in your mouth and hold it between the roof of your mouth and the arch of your tongue. Then you sing around the walnut. That's helpful.

*Have you found any solutions to your technical problems through self-discovery?*

Even if you get a tip from a teacher, ultimately you are your own teacher. Also, I have a teacher that I love who I return to. He was my teacher in graduate school and the last year of my undergrad. He is still my teacher. I have Skype lessons with him now. I went to Houston Grand Opera and did the studio there and I took lessons from Dr. Stephen King. I take lessons from him again when I'm back. My teacher in New York is Trish McCaffrey. So, I like to take different lessons. I'm not one of those people who is married to one teacher. Whatever serves my singing is the thing I need to be doing. Ultimately, you're responsible for your own singing. You cannot blame a teacher for bad singing and you can't give a teacher all the credit for good singing. Even if they help you to have a break through, it's up to you. You're experiencing that in your own body.

*When did you notice your technique settle?*

That's an interesting question. There wasn't a specific moment.

*When you went into your young artist program in 2009, were you feeling confident with what you were doing?*

Yes, I was. I took a year and half break from singing and I went and served a mission for my church in Germany. When I came back lots of stuff had worked itself out. But I hadn't taken a lesson that entire time. I was singing for fun and playing the ukulele, but I wasn't singing seriously. When I came back I won the singer of the year at the university I was attending. I had a new teacher, and everything took off. I had different repertoire and I felt less obsessed with it. I went through a phase where I thought I would live or die by how I sang and that was completely counterproductive. So, I got to a place in my heart where I felt singing was a beautiful thing. I love doing it, but I don't need to be the best in the world at it anymore.

*You just mentioned that you had a change in your repertoire. How did it change?*

I was still in the phase where I thought of myself as a dramatic coloratura because I could sing high F's easily. I couldn't really chirp it, but I could phonate up super high. So, I clearly thought that I'm Joan Sutherland. Then I got cast to sing the Countess in the *Marriage of Figaro* and I thought it was so boring. It's all middle voice and my middle voice had all these holes in it because I was wailing in the high all the time. I just didn't care about the middle. Then, once I sang it I realized the Countess was good for me. So, it did shift into a more lyrical repertoire from the coloratura.

*When you refer to the middle voice, do you mean below the passaggio or through the passaggio?*

I mean anything on the treble staff.

*So, what did you do to help fill that out?*

I had voice lessons and had to focus the voice down the front instead of down the back. I couldn't just drop to the low. I had to carefully carry the voice down with a skinny, forward placement.

*How has your voice changed since having children?*

My phonation is brighter. The onset is bigger and brighter and more metallic. I used to have an ease of production that I don't have anymore. It might just be a phase.

*Is there a role that has changed your life?*

Yes, it is the Countess. All the roles you sing will have an affect on you if you're doing it right. You put yourself out there. You must understand why they do what they're doing. It should affect you emotionally. It should make you have a broader range of compassion for people of varying circumstances. I get to sing the Countess all the time. It was so hard, and I wondered why anyone would want me to do it. I kept thinking that "Dove sono" is so hard! Why am I being paid to do this? They just don't know that it's terrible. That's what I thought. They just don't know. Somehow, I've pulled the wool over all these people's eyes.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Okay. I'm about to say something crazy that I haven't really thought about before this moment. I think dramatic sopranos tend to be marginalized in their personal lives because of what they look like and because of the size of their instrument. For instance, it's harder to put them in a choir. So, they'll be these people with music enthusiasm they can't quite fit in a vocal context. Then you end up with baggage. You need a teacher who is loving and who won't beat up on you. I think that is more emotional than just the bare bones of your instrument. I think people have natural proclivities and a natural capacity within their own voice to sing this way or that way. How much of your technique is inborn? How much of it did you just divine by listening to other singers? That's a different story entirely. But, you need someone who will cherish you and who will help you to feel confident and comfortable in your own gifts and your own message, so you can express it freely. That is not unique to dramatic sopranos. But, I would say dramatic sopranos have a little tougher row to hoe because they're different from what society considers the correct way to be a woman, which is small and quiet. Weepy and needy is not characteristic of a dramatic soprano.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Try to sing Mozart if you can. It's a controversial subject. Some people think Mozart is poison for a big voice but that's not been my case. But, like I said, I don't have the biggest voice in the world. But I have a voice that sings Wagner. I mean, I'm paid to sing Wagner. I feel comfortable in the lyric Wagner roles like Elsa, Eva, and Elizabeth. Within ten years I'll probably be singing bigger repertoire. I'm going to do my first *Liebesverbot* in a couple of years and that's obscure Wagner. I'm starting to dip my toe into Strauss which is more lyrical. Just try to be patient with yourself and try to sing the relaxed way. Try not to be obsessed with the bigness of your voice to the point of short changing your ability to be an artist. You don't have to be a train. Find repertoire that sings to your heart and perform that. Make sure that you are connected to it artistically and sing whatever makes you happy. Never lose your love for it even though it's a challenging venture becoming a dramatic soprano.

**Christine Goerke: email interview on August 4, 2016**

*Briefly describe how you began singing opera.*

I was a woodwind player from the age of 9 and had planned on becoming a high school music/band teacher. I taught myself to play most of the other woodwind instruments by the time I left for college and became a music education major at SUNY@Fredonia. It took one semester (and a fateful sight-singing placement test) to realize that I should concentrate on my singing instead. I left that university and eventually landed at SUNY@Stonybrook closer to home and found my first teacher. She confirmed what others had said, and the rest is history.

*Briefly describe your career in its current stage.*

Uh.... Fairytale? I never expected my career to go as far as it has. My goal was to pay my bills doing what I love. It nearly derailed as my voice and *Fach* changed, but picked up again in a way that I couldn't have imagined. I'm lucky enough to be singing in nearly every major opera house in the world, and also singing repertoire that only a handful of women are able to sing. It's definitely a fairytale. Charmed. Blessed.

*Where do you see yourself in five years?*

Tough question. I actually have things in my schedule that are four years in advance. I have one thing in my schedule that is five years from now. With my kind of voice, I suspect I'll have a choice. When my top goes (and it will - it happens to all of us), I will have a choice to drop down to dramatic mezzo roles (I have a list already, and Klytemnestra is ON it) or making the decision that it's time to head in an administrative

direction. I keep threatening to go straight up Beverly Sills on some small company. Who knows?

*When did you realize that you had a larger voice?*

I had folks telling me that I was a dramatic soprano from the time that I was twenty-four-years old. My teacher then was so smart. She'd say "Well, they may be right. But today you are a lyric coloratura. Let's sing Mozart." I will be eternally grateful to her. When I was around 32, things started to really fall apart. I had no idea what was wrong. I always worked very hard and suddenly my throat felt incredibly tight and nothing was working the way it was before. That's when I changed teachers, and things started opening up. My voice had matured into the thing that folks told me that it would be since I was a young singer. I just didn't know what to do with it. Long story short, I cut off my support to try to keep the instrument in a slim place, which did not work. Once I reconnected my support, I began to see just how large the instrument was. It continued to grow over the next ten years. It's still keeping me on my toes.

*What technical vocal problems did you struggle with as a younger singer?*

I was a bit too stupid to be afraid of anything. Coming from a woodwind background, my breath just worked. I didn't have to think about it. I was topping out around a Bb, and could manage coloratura to a C, but I was terrified of it. It was a fear/tightening of the throat kind of thing, which I eventually let go of. The first real vocal problem came with the above change of *Fach*. Also, I didn't understand about how to make the space in the back for a long time. I couldn't grasp that one. Now I understand that you can't have point without space, but at the time it was all point, all the time.

*What tools did you use to overcome those struggles?*

Let's talk about the big struggle. I had disconnected from my support. So, I had to find a way to reconnect. I went to study with Diana Soviero, and she is ALL about the *bel canto*/Italianate technique. I think there is only one way to sing. That's it. No matter the repertoire. It is *appoggio*. This is what saved my bacon. I didn't understand the leaning into the muscles that is required, or how low the support needs to be. We used a yoga ball against a wall to help me feel it. I laid on my back and raised my pelvis up to help to feel it. My favorite, and the way that I show all the young singers I work with now, is to just push on a wall, on a piano, on something. (I know you're going to try it!) Feel those muscles? It is simple. How something so simple could nearly derail my career is incredible, but that's what happened. It took three months before I'd figured it all out and within a year, it was consistent.

*What operatic repertoire felt most comfortable to you as a young singer?*

I sang a lot of Mozart and dramatic Handel roles in the beginning of my career. I sang some Britten, Gluck, and as I tried on the "big girl" repertoire I sang a bit of Weber and Massenet. I sang lyric roles, lyric coloratura, and dramatic coloratura.

*Is there a particular role you felt helped solidify your technique?*

No, not really. I will say that when I started singing Strauss, I finally felt like I'd found my home. The line allowed me to use all of my instrument.

*What are some arias that proved to be helpful in cementing your vocal technique?*

I don't think there were any particular arias. I think it's more about how different composers wrote. My technique before the *Fach* change was, in fact, different than it was afterwards. As I said, once I got into the lyric "big girl" roles things started feeling better. I remember working on Arabella's aria for the first time. I thought, "This is it." Then I could exercise my understanding of the new support and line I had been working so hard on.

*Do you still struggle with the same pedagogical problems from the beginning of your career?*

No. As time marches on, you get to try on all NEW ones! Those two rubber bands that we try to make a living on? They change every year. Every month. Hell, we're women. They change from day to day! The game is to recognize what is going on and know which tool to use that particular day, and to be able to pull it out on demand.

*What are some solutions your teachers gave you to fix technical issues?*

I'll talk about the "finding the space" thing. I was taught early on to "show my eye teeth" to be sure that I have the focus up front. Turns out, I never really had a problem with focus and had to learn to trust that I needed to leave my mouth alone. So, it was a lot about LONG mouth, lazy mouth, etc. Then I began to find my ability to mix the colors and have the full palate my voice was capable of.

*Did you find any solutions to your problems through self-discovery?*

Don't we always? I mean, teachers can give us the ideas and tell us what we should be looking for. But in the end, it's up to us to take the information away and put it into practice. My teacher is a miracle, but she'll be the first one to tell you that I did the work, not her. My face, my body, and my instrument are all different than hers. She can give me a few options as to how she'll explain something, but in the end it's up to me to find how that practically translates to my instrument.

*When did you feel your vocal technique settle? Did this change your repertoire? If so, what were the changes and how did you deal with it?*

I'll let you know when it happens.

*Have you felt the quality of your voice change over the course of your career so far? If so, how?*

Of course. I think I addressed a lot of this already, but one thing that changed the color of my instrument were my two pregnancies. My voice got to be warmer and rounder, just like my hips!

*What role changed your life the most? Explain why.*

Elektra...hands down. I was singing Chrysothemis happily for years and had a few more contracts on the books for it. I had decided that if I took on Elektra, I would wait until I was at least 45 years old. (Why that number? No idea. Just sounded right.) A call came when I was 40. "We want you to change roles. Would you please sing the title role instead?" I said, "I'm sorry, it's just far too soon for that, and I feel that I sing Chrysothemis very well." They said, "Well, you do! But the problem is if you're singing Chrysothemis, who is going to sing Elektra?" I said, "I don't know but that's not my problem." "Actually, it is. We can't cast you as Chrysothemis anymore. So, it's time to step up or sit down for a while." I would have been 42 when I sang it for the first time. I shot an e-mail to Deborah Polaski. I told her the whole thing. I said I felt like it was too soon, but if she would work with me, I'd do it. She said something brilliant to me the year before. She said that we Americans are far too concerned with numbers. If your voice is supposed to sing a certain repertoire, and the technique is behind it the numbers JUST don't matter. Turns out? She was right, and I had done more damage trying to stay in repertoire that was too small for me. I did decide that I would ONLY sing it lyrically, not the way I'd heard people screaming through it. I thought that if people didn't like that then that's fine, but it's my interpretation. The role insisted I learn about how to deal with my stamina and that I examine the orchestral score to know when I had to deliver sound and when I could coast. Then it was about the text more than the volume, and that no matter how bombastic the orchestration, line and legato has to exist at all times. I am irrationally possessive of that role. She taught me all of the things.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Well, each type of soprano voice requires a training specialized for them. Dramatic sopranos have so much in common with mezzos that I'd say the training is closer to that type of voice than to other sopranos. I always tell folks I'm a mezzo with a top.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

I would say as tempting as it is to run for Brünnhilde, walk before you run. If you do this right, you're a CHILD at 45. My first "big girl" steps included Agathe in *Freischütz*, Eva



in *Meistersinger*, Elsa in *Lohengrin*, Chrysothemis in *Elektra*, and Arabella. But, there are dramatic roles in Handel! If you have coloratura? Use them! There is Armida in *Rinaldo*, *Agrippina*, *Alcina* and even Mozart's *Vitellia* and *Elettra*. Ellen Orford is a GREAT one for baby big girl voices, though folks seem to be casting that very light these days. Try to avoid the roles that don't allow your top to shine. There is plenty of time for those when the top is super solid, and your middle is even and full without pushing. It takes time.

*In summary, would you name the top three pedagogical issues you have had over the course of your career and the solutions you felt helped you overcome them the most?*

I already talked about the support issue and the same with the space and focus. Honestly, those were the two that I struggled the most with and continue to have to remind myself of. I feel like we tend to look for the minutiae and forget that it's actually a fairly simple thing to do, this singing thing, when we do it right.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Patience. We big voiced girls HATE, HATE, HATE that word. Crawl before you walk. Walk before you run. It's easy to want to run head long for this glorious music that we get to sing. Be truly sure you have all of the tools in your tool bag ready to go at a minute's notice before you do it. Longevity is the key. We've all heard the singers who have jumped too soon. The ones who fancy themselves "dramatic" voices, when what God gave them is actually a big lyric voice. You know those music theory courses that you took in college? The ones that made you think, "Man, this is like parallel parking. When am I going to use THIS?!" Get to a library. Sit yourself down with orchestral scores of ALL of the things you're studying. Know the harmonic movement. Know what instrumentation is under you at all times. GO to the orchestral reads, even if you aren't called, just to hear what is happening. It affects everything.

*Is there any other information that you would like to provide regarding this topic?*

No, other than it takes a village. You can't do this alone. Find your team and be nice to them.

**Rebecca Teem: in person interview on August 14, 2016**

*Briefly describe how you started singing.*

Singing for me was a constant companion. The very first opera I remember hearing was the orange on Sesame Street that rolls out of the bowl and starts singing the Habanera. I got into music in high school because of a crush on a trumpet player. So, I started playing trumpet. When I had my wisdom teeth removed I couldn't play trumpet any more. So, I switched to voice and started my formal voice education at Kennesaw State University. I

studied with Donna Angel who founded a small opera company called Capital City Opera in Atlanta and I sang a lot by the way with her. There was never money for a major full orchestra and you make most of your own costumes while singing everywhere you can. I had the allergy instilled in me in college against Wagner. They said it would kill my voice and that I must sing Mozart. No, my instrument likes whole notes and not recitative. As much as I love Mozart it's just not for me. But you don't learn that. There are a lot of falsehoods unfortunately perpetrated in university education as far as I can tell as a professional engaged opera singer. I was blessed in that my voice was very naturally well-anchored and very naturally evened out. I didn't have too much to fill in when I found a teacher who understood what was going on. I've also been blessed to not have too many teachers. I studied for a while with Walter McNeil who used to fly in to Atlanta from New York. He was raised on the knee of the world's finest singing talent in the world. He's a son of Cornell McNeil. When he gave up teaching and singing, I then switched to his teacher. Moving to New York took a round-a-bout path. I had to work my way through college in restaurants. That wasn't going to work for singing. It debilitates the body. For the singer, the entire body is the instrument. We're Olympic athletes, really. Once you get on stage and are doing your job, we're Olympic athletes. So, I trained to be a massage therapist at the Atlanta School of Massage and I taught massage. I learned invaluable things about my body, about focus, about concentration, about energy, and control through that education and that's been the best education of any I've embraced. It has taught me more as to how to take care of my instrument, how to pace myself, how to be with people on stage, and how to be with an audience. It doesn't sound like it should be so equal given as massage is a very intimate thing to people, but it's true. Then I moved to New York. It took me seven years before I moved to Germany. It took me five years to get an agent and that came about because I sang for Tom Stewart and Evelyn Lear in Washington D.C. Washington D.C. has a Wagner Society that wanted desperately to have a connection with Tom Stewart and Evelyn Lear who lived in Silver Springs at the time. They said we will only be connected with the Wagner Society if we can somehow promote young American singers who should sing Wagner's music. They started me in the Emerging Artist's Program. So, I'm one of several singers who came through that experience who are having careers. Evelyn put me into contact with my American agent. He'd been in touch with me in my audition tour in 2006 with the agent that represents me in Germany and I'm still with her to this day. It's not an easy road. Anyone who decides they want to do this must want to do it or have no other option. It brings about financial ruin. It spends a lot of lonely heart-breaking time. You are constantly under scrutiny for things that have zero to do with producing a tone. This is all for ten minutes or twenty minutes of applause. Jobs are becoming fewer. Houses are closing or revamping and are becoming more American than German. The fees are shrinking. Well-established famous singers have less to do and are worrying about what they are going to do next to get to retirement. You have to want to do this. It has to be your only option, really.

*Describe what your career looks like right now.*

I'm coming off a very, very successful season. Next season I don't have a lot to do but what I have to do is in really good houses. I'll be singing *Elektra* in Stuttgart. I'll be singing *Götterdämmerung* in Leipzig. I have the *Elektra* in Essen where I just debuted it on stage. There are negotiations for an extended guest contract for the next season, but it's not signed so I don't really want to talk about it. A lot of my career so far has been through covering. I did my first *Walküre* in 2008. I came back to New York in March 2009 with no more work and nothing to do. So, I came back to New York and contacted the people who I had done massage for to say I could substitute massage. Then I got a call from my agent who asked if I could sing an audition at the Met. They needed someone to cover a performance of *Walküre*. Not a problem. I went in and sang, and they took me for covering the Brünnhilde in the last run of the Schenck *Ring* in 2009. And for various reasons my colleague could not do a lot of the rehearsals and I was privileged to work with Otto Schenck and to sing musical rehearsals with James Levine, James Morris, and John Tomlinson. I got to rehearse with Johann Bolta and all of them scenically so there was a lot of talk if the singer I was covering would go on. Instead of letting me go on they found someone else who was in Washington DC singing the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde. You know, you sign a contract to cover. That's no guarantee.

*What technical problems did you struggle with as a young singer?*

I started vocal training at nineteen. The question from the very beginning was, "Are you a mezzo or are you a soprano?" It's a very big, warm, beautiful voice with a lot of ping. That was a stumbling block from the whole development stage even into my early thirties. No one could understand what a dramatic soprano voice sounds like that never was anything else. They have to start somewhere. You can't start at twenty singing those things, but you can sing Third Norn. You can sing the *Rhinestöchter*. You can sing lots of Brahms *Lieder* and things that feed into that. That was the main thing. Pedagogically, I had a well-established voice already. I was sort of born with a natural placement. I always sang where I laugh which is proper placement. I have a rather strange tongue that automatically promotes correct tongue placement. Sure, you have to learn registration. I had to learn breath control and registration just like everyone else. When I started working with Walter I think I was about twenty-six or twenty-seven and I had already been out of college a few years. He felt also that the voice was pretty much ready but there were just a couple of little things we needed to do.

*What were those little things?*

We worked on raising the fundamentals of the voice. We worked on the stabilization of the larynx so that the cords stretch accurately on high notes. We worked the maintenance of sub-glottal pressure and *appoggio*. I had to do these things consciously. All of these things come up again and again every time you learn a role. This happens particularly with something that's not your language or if you've never studied that language. The learning of the language and wrapping your oral upper respiratory musculature around a language puts you in positions that it's never been before. That creates renewed awareness of proper vocal technique. Having your vocal technique secure and then

getting the role worked into your body and how you understand the awareness of your technique in your instrument is key. Otherwise, these bugs come, and they never go away. It becomes a neuromuscular pattern that you never get away from.

*What are some roles you would suggest to up and coming dramatic sopranos to look at before moving into the bigger repertoire?*

I'm probably not the right one to ask about that. I was quite happy pretending to be a mezzo and Verdi mezzo roles are a lot of fun. I sang Azucena and, interestingly enough, the *Walküre* Brünnhilde is the same tessitura as Azucena. Of course, I sang Azucena with optional high C's. Again, when you're in the early stages there is no dark demise in your future if you sing a Norn or if you sing some of these beginning smaller characters in Wagner. There's no shame in that and they're very grounding. The melodies are solid. There's nothing shaky about them. It doesn't take you outside the realm of possibilities. They all sort of lie in the middle. There's no shame in singing opera chorus. When you're in the beginning stages that's when you should sing it. You should never sing chorus after a certain point if you want to be a soloist or else you'll always be placed in the chorus. And when you're in college or right out of college, how else are you going to learn the repertoire without participating? You get on stage in the safety of the chorus for when you have your good days and your bad days. You hear how the big boys do it. You learn how to keep contact with the conductor while you're acting, dancing, hanging upside down, or whatever they have you doing. Also, you learn how directors work with people on stage.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other vocal categorizations of sopranos?*

Good vocal technique is good vocal technique. It changes its parameters from every vocal *Fach* to the other. The mix of chest and head and the mix of color changes is different from voice to voice to voice. Everybody's got to keep their tongue out of the way. Everybody's got to keep their palate up. The most important thing for a dramatic soprano is that the instrument in question is a stamina instrument. We're like cross-country skiers as opposed to gymnasts doing floor work. Isolde is 96 minutes of singing and 43 of it is in the first act. Another hallmark is that you are able to sing the first act of *Tristan and Isolde* full out and then in the second act, sing lyrically with even controlled registration so that there's a total column of sound from bottom to top. That's the definition of a true *Hochdramatischer* soprano. They can't be weak on the bottom. They can't be weak in the middle. They can't be strident in the high. They don't usually have so many high notes. Usually they top out at a C# or a D. Technique for a dramatic soprano goes to the same for everybody, except dramatics need to maintain it for longer amounts of time.

*Is there any additional advice that you would give to up and coming dramatic sopranos in working towards a successful career?*

We live in a very unfortunate time. The thing that is my biggest stumbling block is my look. I'm too short. Even though I'm the same height as Nina Stemme and Susan Bullock, they're already famous and I'm not. So, I'm told I'm too short, but I have a dramatic soprano figure. I have a head like a bulldog, no neck, and a chest like a beer barrel. I have no hips, no waist and I'm only 5'5". It's always going to be thrown in my face. It's cost me many jobs. You can't help that. You can't help that Katherine Foster is 6 feet tall and Goerke's tall, too. They have an idea that dramatic sopranos need to be tall. It's not true. Birgit wasn't that tall and neither was Astrid Varnay. Great singing is great singing. That's not always or very seldom what gets the job. My biggest successes have come in places where I generally didn't even audition. I'm actually in the best shape of my life. I spent over a year on Jenny Craig. I do my Pilates. I walk and I look fantastic. I'm still short. Critics from Vienna wrote a fantastic critique of my performance and my voice and ended the commentary with, "She looks like Beena Mia." She is a children's character in Austria, a little bumblebee. So, he couldn't just leave it alone that this voice in this performance made us all cry. He had to say that I looked like a children's character bumblebee. It comes down to the fact that you just have to have luck. I don't know how many times where I had what was going to be the break-through, but it wasn't because it wasn't followed immediately by a second one. It's not a positive thing to talk about and I'm sorry.

#### Teaching Experts

#### **Victoria Livengood: in person interview June 27, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your musical journey.*

At the age of twenty-four, I went to the Boston Conservatory of Music where my mentor, John Moriarty, would work with me on my languages and dramatic skills. While I was there he said, "You need to do the Met auditions." That would have been the first time I ever did them. It was the first time I ever did a competition, actually. And he said, "You know, it's not likely that you're going to be able to win but you need to do the competition." So, I entered the Met competition in Boston and after four rounds I was tied with the amazing Lorraine Hunt Lieberson. On the fourth aria I must have gone ahead in the race. I ended up winning the Boston New England Regional to go to New York. To my utter astonishment I won in New York and became a Met winner in 1985 when I was twenty-five years old. So, literally the beginning of my career for the first time with a big orchestra was on the stage at the Met. When I sang that day I had probably twenty agents giving me their cards. I had never been to New York so for me it's a bit of a Cinderella in the glass slipper story because of the timing. I was in the right place at the right time and I was prepared. He had my five arias all solidly prepared. That's why on aria four I went past Lorraine because they were all equally good and prepared. And so, I picked my agent and I moved to New York for the first time and my parents gave me twelve months. They said you've got one year. Now how many parents can do that? Mine did and they gave me twelve months and my agent got me the auditions. I got the jobs. My career became busy right out of the gate as a young singer

and I got noted early on as a Carmen. That role opened up a lot of doors for me early on. I became known for that signature role and that helped me get an early start in my career.

*What does your career look like currently?*

I'm actually known in the business right now for reinventing myself. I've gone from being known pretty much as Carmen and Delilah and the seductresses as being known for the characters and the grandmothers and the witches and the bitches. I'm everybody's mother. I'm Herodias in *Salome* or Klytaemnestra in *Elektra*...the crazy over-dramatic mothers. There's a plethora of roles for an aging mezzo and I just kind of reinvented myself and put all that sex appeal thing behind me. I'm often asked how it feels not to be the leading role and I say, "If you're going to pay me to be Renee Fleming's upstairs neighbor, why not?" I'm doing *Streetcar Named Desire* a lot where I was Renee's upstairs loud-mouthed neighbor and that's been a great role and a vehicle for me in finding my new niche. I've reinvented myself for a second career and I'm in the midst of that now. I'm very busy and going to some houses that I've never sang in before. I'm going to Seattle this season coming up and I've made my lyric debut in Chicago. New repertoire opened up some bigger doors for me. It's been really smart.

*When did you start teaching?*

That was accidental. I had nothing in my mind about that until after I retired and I'm not close to retiring yet. It started by people asking me to do master classes. I would do a master class and have students for 15 to 20 minutes each and immediately addressed their main issues. Usually it was body and breath and tension. That's what I would focus on and I would make them laugh. I would try to be funny and make it all light-hearted and the students would then say, "Oh my gosh! I need more than 20 minutes. Where are you teaching?" I would say, "I don't teach" and they said, "Well, I have to have a lesson." The ones that were persistent sort of forced me to say, "Okay, come to Mint Hill and we'll have a lesson or meet me in New York and we'll have a lesson." I didn't plan it. They gradually came one by one and then somehow over the course of the last five years I now have 100 singers that come in and out of here or New York to take lessons or have consultations. I would say I probably have 50 students where I'm their full-time teacher and the others come when they can. Most of my students fly in here from somewhere else and then I have a bulk of locals. It was not planned but I love it. I'm inspired by it. Now I have to find a way to balance that with my travel and performing.

*When did you begin to teach larger, dramatic soprano voices?*

That came probably about a year and a half to two years into my teaching. It started when I got some mezzos that thought they were mezzos. They had big, huge voices but they didn't understand how to access the upper extension of their instrument. I would say I had two or three of those dramatic mezzos that I knew weren't mezzos when I heard them. Their *passaggi* were on the wrong shelf. I could tell they didn't sing what I sing, and I immediately started shifting into this *Zwischenfach* repertoire. It was obvious that they

kept climbing up and became *spinto* and dramatic sopranos. When the dramatic mezzos started shifting up then dramatic sopranos started coming. The truth is, I would say now in my studio I have more big voice sopranos than I have mezzos. I have no contraltos. So, it's funny. I'm teaching more dramatic sopranos than anything else. Very funny.

*In what types of venues or programs do you work with these larger voices outside of the private studio?*

Actually, I wouldn't say that I do. Everything I'm doing right now is one on one. I did have a program in upstate Pennsylvania, Buck Hill. The Buck Hill Sky Top Music Festival was where I would hand choose students of mine to go with me. I did take a couple of dramatic voices there in my program where we would have a master class with about ten students every day for three weeks and then do a concert. And now, only last summer and this summer, I'm going to Bogota, Columbia, to the National University there. It's funded by the American Embassy in Columbia. I go there and teach the more dramatic voices as well as taking several of my own bigger voices with me.

*What technical problems do you notice most often occurring with larger voiced sopranos?*

It is hard to be generic because every single one of you is a little bit different. The generic things that you all have in common is that none of you really understood how to use your bodies to produce the sound. Generally, I find most big voices are producing a lot of their sound in their throats and with muscle such as neck muscle, jaw muscle, and tongue muscle. I find most of my big voices think they're only good when they're loud. So, what I find is that they just learn to push. They just come in there screaming at me and they have no ability to sing musically. They have no ability to back off the sound and get it on their body and their breath. They just basically yell. What's funny to me about that is that loud voices are actually the ones that are loud all the time. Why do they feel they have to push? It's the small voices, I would think, that would want to be louder. But it's the big voices that come in and just yell. So, my first challenge is to teach them how to get on their body and to let their body and their breath support do the work and to release that kind of hold that they have on the muscles and the tension and let the voice fly. Often what I will find helpful is backing them up one *Fach*. Every single one comes in wanting to sing "Dich teure Halle" and it's more like "Dich teure Holler." So, I say, "Let's not holler right now. Let's learn to sing first." So, I back them up a *Fach* to get them lined up and to work through the *passaggi* and the breaks in their voice and to get their sound even. A big challenge is to even out the registers so it's one big seamless wall of sound instead of having holes and gaps. I do find those are the similar and common challenges with dramatic voices.

*What are the solutions you offer to overcome these technical problems?*

Well, as you know, I start with the body and the alignment. I find that most people can't access their full support system without aligning their body. Most people have really bad

posture and I have learned through the process of teaching that getting their body and spinal column aligned enables them then to get a bigger intercostal circumference breath that encompasses the whole body and not just the front. I find that almost all the sopranos come to me breathing in the tummy. They think their tummy is where they get their breath. You were like that. You didn't understand that the back of the ribs provide access to open the lungs fuller and to give you more of a body of air to sit on. So, I think one of the big solutions is alignment of the body and certainly the breath inhalation where your breath begins and how you stabilize that breath. The other thing for me is that you can't let the big voices over-blow the amount of air. They don't understand that they don't need the air in that sound pushing that air out but that it's a compression and resistance action. It's a lot of body work. And then the next thing I do is I concentrate on their space. I try to get them to have their soft palates more activated and their tongues less activated and not allow them to sing in what I call the swallow position. I think a lot of big voices listen to themselves and they want to sound dark and fat in their head but that is not what cuts over an orchestra. They need to find the balance of the *chiaro* and the *scuro*. As you know, I teach about the shape of the pear in the mouth and getting that funnel focus in the front with that open space in the back. That combination is gold in cutting over an orchestra. I know that because I have a big voice myself. I've learned for stamina and longevity you must have that cutting ability over the orchestra. If it's all dark and beautiful in my head that's not necessarily going to carry to the balcony. Finding everybody's balance of light and dark in their sound and getting their tongue and jaw to release so that they can access their full resonance on an open easy stream of air is the real trial.

*What are some solutions for registration difficulties?*

Generally, I find for the dramatics that the upper *passaggio* is the key to everything. I made up this system to help all of you feel what I experience when I sing. So, I went through it and with trial and error I located where I resonate my E natural in my *passaggio*. Even though I'm not a dramatic soprano it's been unusual for me to see how finding a map for your resonance by locating the easiest possible resonating pocket in your upper *passaggio* has opened up the top a whole step to a minor third on every voice I'm working with. I think that the key starts around D flat for you guys. D flat up to G needs to be accessed without overblowing. Everybody overblows and over fattens and over weights the air pressure in the upper *passaggio*. Then their top is screwed. And so, for me, if you get that balance right of the breath pressure and space then the top of the head and the dome that you sing in for the rest of your notes just opens up like you took a ceiling off of it. You were hitting a ceiling before when you came to me and now you've got all this openness and this ability to resonate much higher than you did comfortably. It's on your body and it's free and easy. Also, on the lower *passaggio* I'm trying to teach everybody to pull their head voice lower and lower and to do what I call caressing their chest voice on the bottom. It's only on occasion dramatically that you need a full-blown, full-bodied, ballsy chest voice. I'm also trying to teach you guys how to bring your head voice lower and lower and then mix the chest into it so that it's caressed and that takes you seamlessly through the lower *passaggio*.



*What heavier repertoire have you studied and sung?*

Well, interestingly enough, the one role I got offered the most in my career that I always said no to was Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. I never did it because I knew that it didn't sit on the right shelf for me. It was one step too high for soprano in the tessitura. I tried to always judge my heavier roles by tessitura. I guess one of the first ones that I took on would have been Azucena in *Trovatore* and I just sang another one two months ago in Hawaii. Azucena ended up being one of the dramatic vehicles for me. Then I found that I had enough sound to do the lower Wagner roles. My favorite Wagnerian role would be Erda in *Rheingold* which is sort of contralto-ish. However, John Carlo Menotti gave me my first Ortrud and that actually kind of freaked me out because it was so high. I would say that was the biggest challenge role that I ever accepted dramatically. Even though it was in a small European house I found after I did it that it sits a little bit too high for me at the end of the opera. The rest of the role felt great. But you've got to look at the whole role. When I really found my niche is when I started doing Strauss. I even like it better for my voice than Wagner and Verdi. I loved the Herodias in *Salome*. My favorite Strauss would be Klytaemnestra in *Elektra*. The first time I did it I just felt like I was putting on a glove. The whole role was fantastic from the dramatics of it, the character of it, the tessitura of it, and the way it rode the line of the orchestra. I knew I had found my home. I kind of consider myself a bit of a Strauss expert and then I dabble in the Wagner and I go back and revisit Verdi. I also like all the contemporary dramatic stuff like *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, which is one of my favorites. I even enjoy switching over into some of the Sondheim like *Sweeney Todd*. Most of what I do now is dramatic, but I also mix that up with comedy so that I keep my voice healthy and pliant.

*What heavier repertoire are you teaching right now?*

They're doing a lot of the Verdi. I have students that are doing Puccini. I have students who are working on Turandot. A lot of the students are working on the Verdi *Aida*. I have students who are working on some of the Strauss but more Chrysothemis instead of the Elektra. I feel like most good Elektras have come to it through Chrysothemis. You need to get that Strauss style down in an easy more lyrical way before you go pushing your way through Elektra. I have a lot of singers working on the Wagnerian stuff. I have several that are working on Ortrud. I give that usually to my sopranos, not my mezzos. I think it's better in a soprano voice or a *spinto*. I have some that are working on Ariadne. That's a great one. I have two or three girls working on Ariadne and Abagaille. You have your Toscas which is a different kind of voice. I have plenty that are doing Tosca. Of my dramatics I would say it's Strauss, Verdi, and Wagner, mostly. Some Weber such as the *Oberon* that you and I have messed around with is good. A lot of you guys are doing similar repertoire, but you vary a little bit. One of my dramatics will have the Wagner on there but then her French is from *Le Cid*. It's the "Pleurez, mes yeux" from *Le Cid*. I do give each of you a little bit different repertoire depending on what you bring to the table. You, for instance, are a pianist and you come to the table with a lot of really good musical instincts. So, I try to give you music that allows you to dabble with your

musicianship where others don't necessarily bring that musicianship to the table. They just want something that's in the pocket and full on. I do have you all varying and yet at the same time there are a couple of roles that you all overlap on.

*In your opinion, what are the vocal challenges for the repertoire we're speaking about?*

I would say it's pacing. When you guys come into the lesson and you're just doing one or two of the arias and you find that you're running out of steam with just doing the main arias you have to realize you've got all the rest of the night to get through. I think the key that all baby dramatics have to learn is the pacing of a role from start to finish. People are going to remember the end more than they remember the beginning. You want to be at your absolute best at the climax at the end of the night. So, I think the biggest challenge probably in the repertoire is learning an entire role and not just the arias. There are many operas where an aria will fit you, but the role will not. That is irritating. Santuzza was that for me. I loved the "Voi lo sapete, o mamma" aria. I couldn't deal with the two duets with the two men back to back. It killed me. So, that's what I mean. I like for you guys to pick your arias based on a role so that when we put you forward people are looking at you in that role. We know you've got that whole role under your belt. I think that's important for dramatics to understand and to practice and learn a role in that way so that you know where the aria comes during the night and where you've come from and where you're going. You sing it in that way instead of an isolated piece. I think the other thing is building up your stamina. I think you get that by practicing every day or at least five days a week so that your instrument becomes much more pliant and agile instead of brittle and stiff. It's like a muscle that you're working out just like an athlete. They don't go out and play a basketball game without stretching. I don't think we should sing this kind of repertoire without building up our vocal stamina which reaches from our toe to our head through practice.

*What are the differences when working with younger singers?*

Well, this is one of the biggest questions on the table, in my opinion. Should young dramatics go ahead and sing the big, heavy, ballsy repertoire? I will let them play with it in the studio with me, but I don't let them put it in their audition packet right off the bat. What my challenge is with young voices is finding a bridge of repertoire. Say they've been working on Mozart. Finding a bridge into the repertoire they will sing when they get old enough and wise enough and consistent enough in their technique is challenging. Consistency is huge. That only comes from technique. For me, finding repertoire I can give baby dramatics that they love and that they enjoy and that they feel like they can let go on without making me look insane for giving them the Verdi and the Wagner right out of the gate when they're in their young twenties is important. And there is plenty of repertoire that I consider that crosses you from a lyric soprano to a dramatic. I tend to give everybody *bel canto* music in the early stages because I think that once they learn to sing in the *bel canto* style and move their big voice that helps them sing something more sustained. Always look for a big dramatic kind of *bel canto* piece to get them into it. That's a great bridge.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Wow! That's a really good and difficult question. I teach what I teach. I teach my coloraturas and my light voices and my men the same kind of alignment and freedom of breath support and releasing tension in the root of the tongue and the singing with a depressed larynx position. I work on all of that with all of my singers. But what I think I have to focus on more with my dramatic voices is getting them to stop listening to themselves and trying to produce such a big wall of sound in their own head. I have to get them to trust the alignment of their sound where their breath is doing the majority of the work by producing the right resonance throughout the range so that they can let go and literally let that instrument soar instead of pressurized pushing on the sound all the time. I don't tend to have to focus on that with my smaller voices. I have to ask them to give me more. With my big voices I'm always asking them to back off and hold that beast back. We can hear with the big voice that there's more in there. You don't have to give it to us like that all the time. So again, it's pacing, stamina, and learning how to control your instrument and how to sing in a really consistent way.

*What are some arias you would suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

I always look at the French repertoire. I look at that French aria in *Louise* called "Depuis le jour." I can give that to a heavy lyric and a young dramatic. The same thing applies to "Pleurez, mes yeux." I look at a lot of French because French is what I love. I often give the girls a beautiful French kind of dramatic lyric piece. I often look at my colleagues that are doing that kind of repertoire. My colleague, Christine Goerke, told me that one of her favorite French pieces to sing is the "O don fatale" that a mezzo usually sings in the role of Eboli. Christine also told me to have people look at "Divinités du Styx." Those arias are a great vehicle for big voices to learn to control their sound. For the *bel canto* it depends on their range and upper extension. A role such as Anna Bolena goes a little bit higher than my dramatic voices want to go. Instead we'll often look at some Donizetti or Bellini and try to find a role that sits in their pocket and suits them well. With the other heavier stuff I try to go more for the *Zwischenfach*. Most of my dramatic sopranos come in with a short top. They come in where they can't comfortably access D flats, D's and E flats. Until they get that extension worked out and it comes in naturally I try to keep them from having to sing up there uncomfortably. So, finding that rep is tricky. That's why I often give them things I consider *Zwischenfach*. I'll give a soprano Santuzza's aria "Voi lo sapete, o mamma" and it fits her perfectly. And then I'll give them the "O don fatale." I'll give them Ortrud in *Lohengrin* because it sits right in that *Zwischen*. You learn to sing that first before you go trying to sing Elsa right off the bat. People who do that often hold their voices in. They squeeze the instrument to hold it back and it's uncomfortable. They're much more comfortable letting Ortrud soar out of their mouth. The *Oberon* was a good one that we worked on. That's also something that's not as heavy as the Wagner but it gets you into that playing field. You're in the right sandbox.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

Start with more of the *bel canto* if you can. If I get them in their twenties that's definitely going to be the *bel canto*. I'm going to teach them to sing Mozart, Handel, Bellini, and Donizetti first. Then we can play with some of the heavier things. I have a young dramatic right now. She's only 24-years-old and the most I'll let her play with right now is Liù in *Turandot*. She may one day be an awesome Turandot but I'm not letting her sing Turandot right now. We're going through Liù first because it's healthy for her and you can tell it fits her like a glove. I'll often use Rosalinda. The "Csárdás" is a great aria. I have sung that opera many times and I often did it with a big voiced soprano. I like a young dramatic voice in that role. I will give some of them Fiordiligi for the Mozart. Fiordiligi is one of the best dramatic roles for a soprano because you've got to go from the tip top down to the low really fast and you've got to know how to move that instrument in and out of those *passaggi*. You've got to have clean coloratura and you've also got to be able to ride all those difficult ensembles. I think Fiordiligi is a great one for girls to work on early in their twenties.

*What about a progression of roles for older dramatic sopranos in their thirties?*

In their thirties it would be exactly what I've done with you. Instead of us jumping right into "Dich teure Halle" we backed things up a bit and we started looking at the *Oberon* and at the "Divinités du Styx." You've worked on Chrysothemis and now you're studying *Fidelio*. For me, what we have you doing is a perfect progression to go from this point to this point in a fairly short amount of time. But you had to start back here and get that solid first without pushing and pressing to learn that you could do this other heavier repertoire in the same way. That's the thing. Also, I think it takes time to understand those characters. You have to have some life experience. You can't give a kid a role like Elektra. There are so many layers and dramatic intensity in that role that a young singer would go out there and blow it out. She would blow herself out. I think we've taken a good progression with you to back you up off the Wagner and now you're ready to get back in it and your voice is lined up beautifully. I would look at the progression of roles we've gone through with you and what you came with and what we backed up to and what we've worked through to get there. It's quite perfect and you can hear that in your singing.

*What are the top three pedagogical issues you've encountered in your teaching with dramatic soprano voices?*

I think I would have to say the tongue, jaw, and the laryngeal position right off the bat. What I've learned is that most dramatic voices over-produce their sound in the throat, the laryngeal position, and the jaw instead of accessing the resonance above there. What I have learned on my own is that cutting that orchestra can be done with so much less air pressure. I feel like it's that compression and resistance in the breath keeping it buoyant. The buoyancy of the breath and the body having no rigidity is important. I think one of the biggest pedagogical problems with dramatic voices is that they lock their breath and

then they're forced to produce their sound up here in the throat and the neck and the jaw and it's all so tense. What I try to do is teach them that the wall of sound comes from their breath and their body and the resistance of that air and learning how to control that. You know, the higher you go, the lower you go in your support. I find the tongue is consistently a problem across the board on the open vowels.

*What would be a solution?*

I have these exercises that I do where I have them place the tip of the tongue on the bottom teeth. I don't think that the tongue should pull back at all in the middle of the mouth. Most people do it in the middle register which makes them sound like Kermit the frog. I teach a relaxed tongue position without it being flat. A lot of people sing with a flat tongue in the back which causes them to sing in the swallow position. I feel like the back of that tongue needs to be in a slightly arched position so that the tip of the tongue can be forward on the bottom teeth. That is what opens your throat and allows you to get a freedom of resonance above there. That produces the biggest sound. The other thing I think it takes dramatic voices a long time to learn is that less is more in your own head. When I get the most sound out of you, you feel like you're getting the least sound inside. So, your sound when it's right feels small to you up top. The other pedagogical thing I have to work on a lot is getting those voices to imagine themselves going from a wide space to a more narrow space. That's something I have to work with all of you on until you feel it and trust it. That's what takes the longest is for you to trust it. Only then can you become consistent in your technique where you can pick up any role and sing it.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

If I had one thing to say it would be that NO is a complete sentence. I had my mama cross stitch that for me and I carried it with me on the road and I kept it on my wall. I believe I base everything on my own experience because I'm still out there performing. I've been doing it 33 years professionally. What I did as a teacher was look at my own longevity and say, "Why have I had this long career?" I think it's because I sang lighter repertoire even though I had a big voice. I sang Carmen for the first twenty-five years of my career. That's enabled me to reinvent myself and go on to the next level. I didn't take my first Verdi until I was over 40. So, no is a complete sentence. Know what is right for you. Know what is too much for you and say, NO. You don't have to do it. You don't have to say, "They've asked me to do that role and I need the money." That's not an excuse, not if you want to sing for a long time. Know yourself, know what fits and doesn't fit, and do not allow anybody else to talk you into doing something else that you know is not right for you. So again, NO, NO, NO is a complete sentence. And when it's time to say YES then you're going to have another whole career of doing those roles that maybe you were born to sing. Be patient. I can't tell you dramatic voices enough to please be patient and don't be so hard on yourself. Don't expect everything to happen overnight. I always say Rome wasn't built in a day. We're building Rome. We're building this glorious spectacular instrument. It takes time and I just ask everybody to be patient and

let everything simmer. I have a lot of analogies, mantras, and a lot of little rhymes and sayings. I make those up so people will remember things. My packs always come in groups of three. I'll tell a singer when they walk in the door, "You must commit to what we're doing and be specific." It's huge for me that singers are specific with what they're doing and that they just don't practice in a sloppy, nebulous way. Practice something specifically and then exaggerate it. In the beginning, you must exaggerate your technique until it becomes a habit. That's one of the three packs. The other one we've hit is imagining yourself going from wide to narrow and your resonance going from the front to the back of the cavernous head for resonance. Also, make sure your air pressure is going from a loud air pressure to a softer air pressure. This means you're compressing the air lower as you climb high. That three pack is a game changer for my dramatics. So, what I've done is find ways to put things in a way that you can remember it and reproduce it when you're working on your own. It's all about consistency.

*Is there anything else you would like to offer regarding this topic?*

Find what you do better than most and focus on that. As a teacher, I'm always looking for your individuality. I'm looking for what separates you from a crowd of mediocre singers. If you bring to the table an additional ability to display superb musicianship, I want to find arias to show that off for you instead of just scream sings. There are plenty of girls who can go out there and just scream. For the screamers I'm trying to find something that allows them to show how loud they are. So, with everybody I'm trying to find your aria package for you to audition with that shows you better than most of the people that will be singing around you that day and makes you stand out in a crowd. It needs to make them remember you. At the same time, I want to bring your own personality and your own physical appearance into the package. This is the day of the package. We need you to look like and have a temperament like what you are performing. Finding those roles and knowing those are your roles and not trying to do the roles that don't fit you at all physically or emotionally is key to success. It is all the things. If one major ingredient is missing you can tell that it's not working.

### **Sherman Lowe: Skype interview on June 28, 2016**

*Would you briefly describe the beginning of your career?*

I went to the School of the Arts in North Carolina and when I finished there I went straight on to the Aspen Music Festival and Wolftrap. Then I moved to New York where I studied privately with several different teachers. I started singing around and did quite a few things in Atlanta, Cincinnati, and Tampa. Then I came to Salzburg to study at the Hochschule Mozarteum where I won the Mozart prize. I should have gone on to the young artist program at the Staatsoper in Vienna, but they closed out the young artist program. So, I went back to New York. I began to suffer from reflux and I never got over it. I had surgery in Philadelphia with Sataloff's wife and it made me begin to think that it was always going to be a struggle to keep on singing. So, I applied for a Fulbright and the Fulbright committee gave me a positive response. Therefore, I came to Venice to do

research on different ways of teaching and I've stayed here now for 23 years. I've been teaching for 21 of those. It's a bigger success than I had dreamed of. I don't even know how it all happened. Singers come here from all over the world to study and it makes me very happy. I follow a lot of people and it's a big responsibility. So, I stopped singing and dedicated myself full-time to teaching. I'm happy to say that my approach to wanting to teach was not because I felt like a failed singer but because it was destiny. Even when I was singing a lot my colleagues would ask me an opinion about what they were doing and what I thought they should do. I always had some kind of advice. I didn't have the educated advice that I have now, but I had an instinct that seemed to help people. I guess that was what was meant to be for me. I could have possibly done both, but one might not be done as well as the other. I'm happy about my teaching. Maybe I do more good for the world of opera singing as a teacher than I did as a singer, anyway.

*When did you begin teaching larger dramatic soprano voices?*

Well, there have always been people in and out all the time. I had two dramatic sopranos here from Australia. Then Susan (Bullock) began to come down. There was also another dramatic soprano from Germany. I teach also in Vienna at the Junges Ensemble at Theater an der Wien in the young artist program there. I see quite a few dramatic voices there. I can't tell you exactly when I decided to see dramatic singers as they started asking to study with me and that's how it happened.

*Other than in Vienna, are there any other venues or programs where you work with dramatic soprano voices?*

I work with them in Vienna, privately here at my home, and I also do master classes. I also teach at the "Accademia Rodolfo Celletti" at the Festival Della Valle D'Itria in Puglia, Italy. Sometimes dramatic voices come to me as a dramatic mezzo. I have one now who is from New Zealand. She has an enormous voice but she's a little bit out of her comfort range down there in Vienna. It is a *bel canto* program, but I think it's good for her. It's making her hone down her voice. She has to learn to control it even if it's kind of a wild voice at the moment.

*What technical problems have you noticed most often occurring with larger voiced sopranos?*

I think the most common problem among dramatic singers is the idea that their voice is special and that it has to be handled special. Well, everybody has a special voice. Even a soubrette soprano has a special voice. A contralto has a special voice. A lyric soprano has a special voice. People say you're a dime a dozen but aren't there a dime a dozen of quality lyric sopranos? I think there is a little bit too much emphasis put on the fact that the dramatic voice needs to be treated specially. It needs to be handled with kid gloves like every single voice. Saying that, I tend to treat dramatic sopranos in particular as a normal voice. I think it just happens to be the voice that the person is born with so it's normal for them. It seems to be a successful approach because I think coddling a person

too much thinking that they have such a special voice can slow down their progress. I think I need to be as honest and straight forward and as demanding with a dramatic soprano as I am with a lyric coloratura. For a lyric coloratura that's the voice that nature gave her. It is just as difficult to dominate and get the voice under control to do exactly what the composers have asked her to do in her music as it is for dramatic sopranos. So that approach has in some ways taken off some responsibility for people. For example, Susan started in the chorus in Glyndebourne and she went on to do lyric soprano roles. She was a fabulous Pamina. Then she went on to Tosca. She did the Countess, Tosca, and then Butterfly. She built up to what she's singing now. She did not start off singing Brünnhilde and Elektra. So, I think that's a very healthy thing to do. If one has that capacity when they are young to sing more lyric roles and then develop into more dramatic roles they have a healthier life as a singer.

*Are there technical issues with dramatic sopranos that you notice a bit more than the lighter voices you work with?*

Yes, only because their voice is thicker. The vocal cords have more thickness. It's more fibrous. Usually the muscles in the body are also a little bit more dense, and so the voice feels like it's a little bit dragged down from that. My approach is not to lighten the voice but also not to accentuate the darkness and heaviness of it. There are certain physical positions for singing. Even a light soprano can't sing with a high larynx or she sounds strangled. She can't get her high note if her larynx is pulled up. She can suffocate her high notes if her tongue is choked down in her throat and the same thing applies to dramatic sopranos. The dramatic soprano, just by nature, has a laryngeal structure that's a little bit bigger, a little bit thicker, and a little bit more muscular. Usually the whole apparatus is that way including the jaw, the tongue, the chin, and the facial structure. I'm looking at you and you look like a dramatic soprano. The big cheeks are also an indicator. There's an Australian dramatic coloratura who studies with me who has enormous cheeks, but she doesn't have the thickness in her voice. But it's the dramatic voice that needs to have a lot of thrust. What I find rather unique about dramatic voices is that it is hard to have thrust in the voice without weighing it down with too much air pressure. If they do, they can't sing the repertory. They must be able to resist it. It is just like athletes if you say a light weight wrestler and a heavy weight wrestler in the same sport must play by the same rules. It's just that their body types are different. A voice type is a body type.

*Do you have common solutions that you offer to the heavier dramatic voices as they're navigating their training?*

Yes, I certainly do. It's not to treat the voice like a big voice. Treat the voice like a lyric voice. It's big because nature gave it that. Usually a dramatic voice has a good dose of metal in it. A real dramatic soprano has to sail through a very big Wagnerian orchestra. Turandot is also an example. Puccini likes to double all the melodies with thousands of strings playing along with them. So, the singer must be able to get through it and that can't be done by singing thickly. It has to be done with metal in the sound. The metal can't be fabricated. It just has to be a characteristic of the voice to illuminate the sonority



or the color of the voice. I experimented with some voices by making it big and heavy. That's work. They have to be treated like it's normal for them to have that sound. Don't you feel that way? That's your normal voice, right?

*Absolutely. It feels best when it feels like I don't have to work so hard.*

Absolutely. Working hard comes from many different things. It comes from using the breath poorly and pushing too much airflow underneath the vocal cords. It has to do with holding the larynx in a stiff position. It has to do with pressing the roof of the tongue down looking for a deeper darker position. It has to do with pushing the sound to the front when in reality that just makes it spread. The voice has to turn around the shape of the oral cavity which includes the top of the palate with that cupola shape. The voice should be freed up enough that the air flow is positioned only in one spot instead of going all over the place. That feels much more free. This includes dramatic sopranos. There is no reason for dramatic sopranos to think that they have to be a laser beam and throw it out into the audience. It is just that way by nature. If it doesn't cut through, it's because they're in a bad position physically. Something is eating up the presence of the voice. Sometimes you get dramatic sopranos in a large space and their voice doesn't sound as big. That means that they're over doing pressure in the sound and it cuts the voice in half.

*What dramatic soprano repertoire have you taught the most?*

People bring in everything to me. I would say that I have equal experience in both the Italian and German version of the dramatic soprano. The German version, however, is cut up into two sections: the young dramatic who sings stuff like Senta, Eva, and all that. Then you go on and you have *Hochdramatischer* singers like Birgit Nilsson. That is also the type Susan is. She has fabulous high notes, even at her age. In fact, she wrote to me and she said, "I hope this is going to be my last Elektra but I think I sang it better than I've ever sung it in my life So, I've accepted another contract." She definitely has longevity which is a testament to the technique. You don't always see that all the time. Believe me, when Susan comes for a lesson, we do agility. I give her agility exercises to keep her voice flexible so it does not get bogged down. She's at an age where she's dealing with post-menopause and there's some dryness in the vocal folds. The voice is not as supple as it used to be. In order to keep it limber, I give her Rossini exercises. She can do them lickity split and that keeps her flexible. It keeps her top range going without weighing it down. I would say that one of the biggest problems that I find with the aging dramatic soprano is that the middle-lower range can get breathy. You have to work on it from two different angles. You have to insist on bringing down the head position which is the lighter mechanism. Bring it down as much as possible with point. Also, learn to bring up the chest in your middle voice maybe a half step or whole step higher than they normally would have to get registers blended again. Two years ago, Susan told me that she went off to Houston to sing *Sweeney Todd*. She wondered if she could do it. So, I taught her how to belt by taking her chest voice up higher than an opera singer normally would. And she said, "I've never done this in my life. Will I have a hole in my voice after this?" I said no because the days that you perform I want you to sing Brünnhilde,

Turandot, or something. Elsa goes down low, you know. And then go off and sing Mrs. Lovett and that's what she did. And I told her I wanted her to vocalize also after the performance for only five minutes back into the Brünnhilde mode and she did it. She called me saying she had never been in better voice her whole life. When she came back, her mixed voice had developed incredibly by doing a role like Mrs. Lovett. Isn't that interesting? She said, "I wouldn't have done that as a young singer, obviously, but as an aging singer I thought, why not throw caution to the wind and have a good time." Her voice is in a fabulous situation at the moment.

*What are the vocal challenges for the heavier repertoire?*

One of the most important things is to help the singer realize that the sound they're making is normal for them. I think it's important to help a dramatic voice feel like they are normal and not something so special that you treat them with kid gloves so they don't progress fast enough. For instance, Lotte Lehmann sang Sophie, Octavian, and the Marschallin. Some people think of the Marschallin as a dramatic role instead of a heavy lyric role. Then she went on and sang even bigger roles like Ariadne. She sang some of the heavy Wagner and Verdi roles and also *Fidelio*. So, there are a lot of people that developed their voice to become dramatic over time. If those people were held back when they were young thinking they had to wait because their voice is so special, they wouldn't have had the careers they have.

*Do you notice a difference working with younger dramatic sopranos as opposed to the older, more experienced dramatic?*

Yes. Suppleness of the voice is an example. The younger singer's voice can be manipulated more. They're not so set in their ways yet. The older singer has found a way that works for them. People come to me looking for a solution to a problem because they are wondering what is happening. I have to find a clever way to work around that set idea of doing things and break the mold. For instance, some dramatic voices have this idea that they need to sing with a heavier air pressure than a lyric soprano. That's not necessarily true. It's the structure of the larynx that makes them have that voice, not the air pressure behind it. The fact that they have thicker and more resistant vocal cords allows them to sing at a high decibel for a longer time because the instrument is more resistant to a high air pressure.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Only in the sense that they have to learn to resist this high air pressure. It's not that they sing higher notes or lower notes than other voice types. They just sing with an instrument that's bigger and that voice needs more physical resistance than someone with a lighter voice.

*What are specific arias you would suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study while they're maturing?*

I think you have to give them a varied repertory. I think they need to learn to sing very sustained music. Something like "Porgi amor" is good and isn't too hard. Sing things with a little agility in it. I give bigger voices Donna Elvira because they can be more aggressive with the role. They learn to move the voice in a role like that. If you shy away from helping people learn how to sing with a flexible voice, you get bogged down in the heaviness of your voice. *Zwischen* roles like Lady Macbeth are great choices. Some high mezzos sing it and that is a role that even a young dramatic soprano can do without hurting themselves. I also don't shy away from experimenting in other repertory. Tosca is also another good role. I probably shouldn't say too many names here but there's another quite well-known English dramatic soprano who comes to study with me who still sings Tosca but she did Brünnhilde in Paris last year, as well.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

I think that dramatic sopranos should pass through the *Zwischenfach* and the *Jugendlicher dramatischer* roles while they are building up the voice to stay in the higher tessitura. This includes roles like Elsa, Agatha, and Senta. Also, include Lady Macbeth, Kundry, and Ortrud, because they can be sung by a soprano or mezzo. Then that person eventually becomes a Brünnhilde, Elektra, Frau ohne Schatten, or Turandot. Learn how to sing in the middle of the voice. Don't ask them to sing Pamina. That was unusual for Susan that she started that way and it wasn't her real repertoire. But she eventually found her real voice.

*Can you name the top three pedagogical issues you've encountered over your teaching career and the solutions that you suggested to overcome them?*

Well, the first one is the idea that the dramatic voice has to have high air pressure. It's not true. Birgit Nilsson didn't sing with high air pressure. She never pushed on the voice and it was enormous. You're too young to have heard her sing but I heard her sing. It was never where you felt like she was going a hundred miles an hour all the time. She was just coasting on her voice. Even when she sang "In questa reggia" it was normal for her to make that sound. So, that's why you see younger dramatic voices think they have to make the voice big, so they push too much air out.

*How do you fix that in the studio?*

Sing more lyrical repertoire first. Go back to a *Jugendlicher dramatischer* roles and look at the text and dynamic levels. Ask why you are singing loud there. Another one is the idea that the voice has to be super projective. They get into a position where they're pushing the sound too far to the front. They think they need to push it out. They push it so far into the mask that they don't keep the roundness in the sound. That can slim the voice down by not keeping the roundness.

*How would you fix that in the studio?*

I would do a physiological explanation of what happens to the vibrating air flow in the oral cavity. It expands in every direction. For instance, if I pour water into a form the water is going to take the shape of that form. The air will take the shape of the form that you make, and the oral cavity is made up of movable things. The position of the larynx, the position of the tongue, and the posture of the tongue can affect the posture of the epiglottis. Also, the position of the soft palate and the openness of the jaw affect the space. What else is there you can move? Everything else is an intrinsic muscle. So, when I begin to make this explanation, I ask, "Why are you limiting yourself to thinking like a buzz saw into the front falsely thinking that makes you project your voice?" The voice projects because of the ring on it. Science has basically proven to us that this has nothing to do with squillo. Squillo or ring happens just above the vocal cords. So, the dramatic voice has to learn to keep the oral cavity very toned but not stiff. If the muscles are too slack it won't work. If you lift your palate up, you get more ring developing. People can go too far with that. Then people can start pulling on their palate, stiffening up their tongue, and stuff like that. Then the sound becomes more poor because they can't get into the full sonority of the resonance by stiffening everything up. Muscle tone has to be taut. It can't be tense because then you can't resist. You'll wear out. But, you also can't resist when it's too slack. You'll get a dull sound. If you go too far with that concept then everything's way too stretched in height and it begins to diminish the quality of that sound. I've gone overboard in the other direction. Taut in the muscle tone is important for every voice type but especially for a heavy voice. This is because the heaviness of it can slightly drag a person down.

*Are there any other pedagogical issues you've noticed besides the two you have mentioned?*

Yes. The heavier the voice the more difficult it is to learn to control the relaxation of the larynx in the high notes. The same is true for men. For example, basses and baritones are notorious for having problems in high notes because their larynx pulls up. That's because their larynx is bigger. It's just a bigger structure and it's hard to learn to keep it relaxed. Relaxed is a word to help it stay in its best vibratory position. Then you get into this discussion about constricting muscles and the pull on the larynx. I think that dramatic women's voices have the same issue. It wants to slightly pull in the upper range.

*What solution do you offer?*

I make them understand what pulls their larynx up. The larynx doesn't pull itself up. It's the constricting muscles. There are three constricting muscles. The third constrictor attaches to the cartilage of the larynx. The reason it is such a strong muscle is because it contracts and pulls the larynx up when you swallow. We exercise it twice a minute. So, the muscle is very strong. We get into an uncomfortable range not having any idea how that muscle works. It's logical that until you learn about the third constricting muscle your

larynx is going to pull up. So, I approach it that way. It's working on the third constrictor. Once you show it to people and help them realize what's happening when you swallow, then when you finish the swallowing process the third constrictor relaxes again and you learn to keep that position. I do that obviously. Reinforce the relaxation of the third constrictor.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Go slowly but not so slowly that they don't get in shape. Even if they are singing roles that might be lighter than their voice category, if it doesn't hurt them there's no reason that they shouldn't be doing it. They can sing roles like Rosalinda and the Merry Widow. That's a very healthy thing. It doesn't sit in such an extreme tessitura. It won't hurt you and that will give you much more control of your big voice because you're not keeping it in too slim of a spot. One of my very big things is to not let big voices sing only big repertory.

*Is there any other information you feel would be helpful to offer regarding this topic?*

Let me think about that. We touched on a lot of important issues here. I think the dramatic soprano is still a very rare voice type. I think there are some people who sing dramatic roles who maybe shouldn't. The longevity of their voice will probably suffer for it. Or they go to the roles too soon not having worked through a more normal repertory before they start doing them. That's probably the thing that I've seen most often is that a young singer has been told, "You're a dramatic soprano. You have to wait, you have to wait, you have to wait." But, in the meantime while they are waiting to do that repertory they should be doing things that they can sing.

**David L. Jones: phone interview on August 27, 2016**

*Describe how you began teaching and coaching.*

It began when I had received incorrect vocal education at a university level. I went to a private university and I started to study but I had some problems with the training. Also, I was a lyric baritone and I was placed in the tenor section of choirs. It was a horrible mistake the choir director made because the larynx can't release. So, I had years and years of throat tension and that's what put me on my journey to learning how to teach. A friend of mine had been out to Lindquest and had studied with him and loved what he did. When I was 23 she gave the Lindquest exercises to me and I immediately felt my throat begin to start releasing even though it didn't fully release for some years. So, I had these exercises and I was hired at the same university that I attended to be the vocal coordinator for a musical. I began to work with the singers and I always had good instincts. Then when I had the materials, as well, I started seeing the results from these concepts. That was the beginning, really. I started working in theater departments and then I moved to New York in 1978. I had started writing ballads and one of Barbra Streisand's producers

was interested in having me do some collaboration. So, I started a publishing career. I started teaching in a small music school here in New York called the Metropolitan Music School. My phone rang one night and my friend had arranged for me to go and study with Lindquest. So, that is really how I got started in teaching. After I worked with Lindquest the concepts he gave me were so solid that by 1981 I was making a living teaching.

*I know that's currently still what you do now. You teach privately, in master classes, and travel often.*

Right. I teach in several European cities. I've taught at conservatories and a lot of the instructors are very open. They really want to learn about old world concepts and teaching. I was just very, very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Lindquest. Later on, I worked with Dixie Neill who was the teacher of Ben Heppner when he was at the top of his career. She was the one that really discovered that I was probably a baritone. I only worked with Lindquest for one summer so he didn't really have the time to totally free me. I was teaching in Amsterdam and I heard about her. She was one of the few teachers that I had heard about that knew about healthy cord closure. So, I went and observed and had lessons with her. The last teacher is a woman named Evelyn Reynolds. She's now 95 years old. She studied with a student of Herbert Witherspoon. She had a tremendous teacher so she is the person who really brought my voice to balance. But I teach in different cities. I've taught as guest faculty for the opera school in Stockholm where I met my friend, Leis Lundberg, who knows more about the Swedish-Italian School than almost anybody that I know. He's read all the old treatises about Flagstad's training and Birgit Nilsson. He knew and studied with one of her teachers even though she didn't really like teachers very much.

*When did you start working with larger dramatic soprano voices?*

It was probably shortly after my career was established in New York. In 1982 I started teaching in Europe. I was invited to go to the Netherlands, to Amsterdam, and then I taught in a school in Brussels. Then I started running into some large voices that had really specific issues to address. The main issue was management of breath pressure because big voices often over-breathe and then they push on the breath too hard. I found that a lot of the Lindquest exercises were helpful. He gave me about three or four exercises that were more involved in the training of Flagstad because he worked with one of Flagstad's teachers. Actually, it was really after I worked with Lindquest that I heard him work with several large voices. I learned a lot about breath pressure and about healthy adduction of the vocal folds without squeezing. It is a gentle closure of the cords after the breath. What I've found is that a lot of really big voices take a breath and leave the glottis open and then they push air pressure to make things happen. This little idea of the gentle closure after inhalation was really helpful to the bigger voices, especially for the ones who had a history of pushing too much breath pressure.

*Right. So, I know that you have a CD out that has vocal exercises on it. Are those your own or are they a combination of some of the Lindquist exercises?*

I have a mixture of exercises on the CD. That CD is basically an introduction to the concepts. There are concepts on there like laryngeal tilt that is an old Swedish-Italian exercise. The “ng” is on there and that was one of Flagstad’s basic trainings. It teaches how to do the “ng” after a vowel so that we first tilt the larynx and then go to the “ng” because a lot of people squeeze it. That CD is a mixture but there are a lot of concepts. For example, the Swedish-Italian School is a bit of a mixture of some of the umlaut vowels and the strength of the vowels in the pharynx of the Swedish language and a little bit of German school and Italian school all mixed together. If you want I can email this to you. I think I have the history of the Swedish-Italian School. I can't think of the list right off hand. I know that there were a few famous teachers that used it. There's definitely a connection to both Garcia and Lamperti in that family tree. Dr. Bratt, Flagstad’s teacher, was a true doctor and operative baritone and a voice teacher. He was very famous at that time. He wasn't for everyone because I don't think he was the softest personality. But when Flagstad went to him in 1916 he said, “You have the voice of a child but I can save you from this fault if you allow me to work with you twice a week.” The first thing he did was work the speaking voice. Her vocal cords didn't close properly in her speaking. It was a breathy, non-resonant speaking voice. There's a youtube video of her speaking on singing Wagner. You hear this big rich and dark ringing in the speaking sound. So, that's representative of a lot of the work Bratt did with her. The first six months was the speaking exercises then he went to the singing. So, that's what he based his work on; the healthy closure of the cords, the strength of the vowel in the pharynx, and not blowing too much air pressure but giving just the right amount of a little tiny air stream.

*Name the top three pedagogical issues that you have observed specifically in dramatic sopranos and the solutions you personally offered to help them overcome those pedagogical or technical issues.*

Okay, yes. Thank you. That's a good question. The top three I would say is over-breathing and using too much breath pressure. Also, vibrato issues and registration issues which are a result of using too much cord mass too high in pitch can be the cause of the wobble. What I do with the over-breathing is that I have them give themselves a hug and then lean over from the hip sockets much like the Alexander technique. It forces the breath to go into the back. In my research I’ve found that the ribs, the diaphragm, and sternum have much more connected tissue in the back. It makes sense that the breath in the back would give you a fuller inhalation. So, that was one of the concepts of training. I work on a lot of the back breathing. Over-breathing comes when the side ribs hyperextend too wide so I also tell people breath is north south and support is east west. A lot of people try to breath east west and they take a lot of air in the ribs. Of course, that's where the lungs are but the problem is they hyperextend the ribs and they don't really get as low of a breath. I work with them sitting and I also work with them sitting on the edge of the sofa. They feel their hip sockets and I show them the breath going to the back. We also feel the abdominals. Of course, we don't breathe below the line of the lungs so as to get the organs to drop forward so that the lower lobe of the lungs can realize a fuller breath when the breath reaches full inhalation. Another way I get them to breathe into the back and works beautifully is that I have them exhale through the hand

on the lower abdominal wall. They feel the lower abdominal wall flatten and then feel the lower wall relaxing. This forces the back ribs to go into motion. The big problem with inhalation is a lot of people are frozen in the back ribs. A good Alexander teacher will talk about that quite a lot and will address that issue. And when the back ribs are frozen you're going to get a high breath. You're not going to get the full release low into the body.

*Can you talk about the wobble?*

The wobble is often viewed to be over-breathing. And, of course, everything is so connected that the forcing of the throat pressure often invites the dramatic soprano to push the registration. With the registration issue I have specific exercises. They'll have problems in their registration and then they'll go crashing into the chest register and then it will be very big and thick. So, what I do is little tiny thin edge exercises like little tiny staccatos having singers just touching the fine edges of the folds. Weirdly it's very strange to me that the brain can control this response. I work also on what Lindquist called the *voce cuperto*. It is a very old Italian exercise that translates in the old Italian as singing open-toed and in a small embouchure. It's a little tiny "oo" that some of the voice therapists have done a lot research on. Dr. Joseph Stimple has done a lot of research with birds which resemble the "oo" sound. This sound thins the cords and they vibrate beautifully together. I believe you can even buy recordings of his research, as well. The third problem is imbalanced registration. Those are the three main issues. Imbalance in registration I addressed in the *cuperto* with a little tiny "oo." I also check the jaw position. A lot of dramatic voices have a forward jaw. I remember I worked with a heldentenor many years ago at the Paris Opera and he contacted me when I was in London. He had been to several older professionals and was really suffering from a lot of imbalance. It took about fifteen seconds to figure the problem with him was neck and jaw tension. His jaw was thrusting forward so the larynx was coming out. So, then we got his jaw to relax back for each vowel and the text in a very relaxed way. The solution I used was to look at the ceiling and let the jaw fall and then adjust back to gravity so they can feel it. Then I have them say "Ya Ya Ya" and experience some release in the jaw that way. The registration imbalance had a lot to do with how forward and open the pharynx is because it invites a high larynx position. What's sad about that situation or bad for the singer is that they get a lot of internal feedback. There is a lot more sound from the jaw and the larynx is slightly up and when the larynx should release the jaws comes back. I've had the experience in one Metropolitan Opera soprano who was sent to me by her voice therapist. She was suffering from edema on the vocal cord. She came in as a larger voice and when she came in one of the first things I noticed was that her jaw went to one side. I showed her how to touch her jaw and align it and what she felt was a cracking almost as if her jaw had been slightly out of its socket for a long period of time. So, she went up for vocal cord surgery. We worked about five sessions and I went to hear her at the Met. Her big response from the jaw which released was I can't hear any sound. Nobody's going to be able to hear this sound. I said, "Well, let me go to the Met and sit on the back row in the rehearsal." It was very interesting. It was actually much bigger than it had been before, to the listener, of course, and not to the singer. About three months later she met



me in Sweden. She flew in from Munich for a two-hour session and the first thing she came in with was her doctor's release because the edema disappeared on the vocal cords because of the alignment of the jaw. So, I've worked a lot with the jaw in terms of balancing registration, as well.

*What repertoire would you suggest if you had a young dramatic soprano come to you asking for your opinion?*

Usually it depends on their development. There's a big difference between age 28 and age 30. I find that the voice develops a lot between 28 and 30 and it develops a lot between 30 and 35. From that point to age 30 I call it the five-year point. The voice seems to shift and grow and change in registration about every five years. My recommendation is different if the voice is quite developed and if they don't have a lot of vocal problems. If they're young and have a lot of vocal problems I start them on song repertoire that has longer lines like Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler. Anything that has slow, long lines allows me to see what the jaw and larynx are doing in the text. I also choose something with slow tempi. Then I actually put them on what Lindquist taught me about which are the Sieber vocalises. Sieber was a Viennese-Italian trained voice teacher. He wrote exercises based on the Italian syllables. They are the step between vocalization and repertoire because he arranged the vowels in such a way that the registration is more in balance. So, I put them on that. They come in soprano, mezzo, alto, and tenor, baritone, bass. So, I make sure that they don't get the wrong voice type. Sometimes I'll start the dramatic voices on the mezzos because it lies a little lower and they tend to raise it naturally. I use the Sieber for mezzo because it doesn't go quite as high if they have a full middle voice and they don't have problems in their middle voice. After their voice develops or if it's a voice that doesn't have a lot of problems then I have them start looking at the lighter things like *Freischütz*, "Und ob die Wolke." I also have them look at a little bit of *Lohengrin* but I give them lots of song repertoire at that point, as well. There's also "Il est doux, il est bon" from *Hérodiade* which isn't so high but has dramatic intention without being a voice killer. Mr. Lindquist taught that aria to a lot of dramatic voices. Then I have them look at Sieglinde. Tessitura is also a factor in what I give them. There are two kinds of dramatic sopranos: there are those who have a very easy spinning top often coming from dramatic coloratura range and then you have what I call the fuller, lower dramatic sopranos that have the thick middle voice. Nina Stemme is an example of that.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

I think that they require more focus on body connection. I think a lighter voice can get away with less body connection, but a dramatic soprano will develop all kinds of problems unless they are fully connected to their body. Flagstad called it the body hook up and she said that once she found the full body connection it was as though her body and her voice were one entity instead of two, which I think is an interesting idea. She also said that when she was singing really well she felt that the sound was washing down her chest like a waterfall. I also think dramatic voices need to hold back more air pressure or

else they just blow their cords right out. A lyric will disconnect from their body and still do okay. I'm not saying that's anything I would advocate. But, I think that the lyrical voice can get away with it much easier than the dramatic voice simply because of the repertoire and the physical demands.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Look into programs that are open to larger voices. I think a lot of the young artist programs are geared toward lyrical voices. This is because they can sing quieter in the chorus without sticking out. I would try to look at the Dolora Zajick program. I would look at competitions that are open to bigger voices. I would find the coaches that know this repertoire and specialize in it. Then I would recommend that they find a mentor or maybe an agent that is specifically interested in dramatic voices. One of the things that dramatic voices are faced with now is that a lot of opera companies are cutting back on their dramatic productions because of cost. It's a matter of finding the opera houses that are still producing larger scale productions, as well. I have a soprano in Germany who sings in Munich quite a bit. She's a Verdi soprano. It took her quite a while to get her foot in the door because a lot of the smaller opera houses in Germany are using more lyrical voices for dramatic roles. I don't agree with it, but they are doing it to save money. If they can sign a Fest contract with somebody and have them sing all these different roles all year then they don't have to spend so much money. I would look for the competitions and I would look at the opera houses that are open to hiring bigger singers. They do exist. I would look at agencies in Germany that are open to having dramatic voices on their roster. Find somebody who specifically enjoys your talent. I think that people don't understand the value of networking sometimes. Networking, getting to know the right people, and singing for people who will hear you is important. We're looking at a market where there are more singers than jobs. You need to come in with something specific. That's why I'm so adamant about people developing their own unique sounds. If you develop a sound like everybody else you're going to walk in and they're going to think you are another generic singer.

#### Coaching Experts

**Richard Nechamkin: in person interview on June 8, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your musical journey.*

When I was a baby I had a cousin who was into opera. He would bring opera records over to play on my dad's old Motorola record player. I got to know these operas very well. We had *Aida*, *La Bohème*, *Traviata*, and *La Gioconda*. I played them over and over again. For my fourth birthday, my parents asked if I wanted to see the Mets or go to the Met. I really wanted to go see the Mets, but the proper answer was that I wanted to go to the Met. The opera was *Traviata* with Anna Moffo, Richard Tucker, and Robert Merrill. All I remember is standing up and yelling *bravo* and *encore* whenever anybody

applauded. The patrons probably thought, "Oh, that's so cute." We also watched Liberachi on television. During the show I would put my little, tiny, fake piano in front of the TV and make believe that I was playing along with him. So, my parents decided to get a piano for me and I took piano lessons. That was the beginning of the end. I eventually earned a bachelor's degree in viola. After college is when I really learned my craft. I sought out the people I wanted to work with. At college I met Anton Coppola, who was my second conducting teacher. I also sought out Sixten Ehrling and Pierre Boulez and worked with them for a long time. Pierre Boulez taught me how to conduct. I got a gig with the Long Island Opera Theater Workshop to music direct under Lee Fowler, who ran the company. He basically did all the Mozart operas repeatedly. While rehearsing the *Magic Flute*, a lot of the cast quit. Lee had to fold the production and I was hired to do it. Following that, I worked with a chamber orchestra, the Flushing Y Sinfonietta, at the YWHA in Flushing, Queens. The largest orchestra we used was about forty-five pieces. From that conducting experience combined with pianistic skills I went on to conduct a lot of stuff from the piano, which I still do. A wonderful baritone, George Moldinado, who unfortunately is no longer with us said, "Why don't we start our own group and keep it positive? Make it a group that singers are going to want to work with." We began by doing *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* and it continued from there. Simultaneously, I was working with people now known as the Manhattan Opera Association. We decided to start Opera Forum concurrently with our group. Once incorporated, it became Opera Forum. Eventually we decided to part ways. They formed the Manhattan Opera Association and we formed the New York Opera Forum.

*What does your career look like currently?*

With New York Opera Forum we do one opera every month except when I'm not here. I also do a lot of vocal coaching. Working with Dr. Jay Dean, a conductor in Mississippi, is the only outside gig I take because I love working with him.

*What does the New York Opera Forum look like?*

We prepare singers to perform their roles. We give enough preparation, including public performances, so that they're secure with the roles. By doing the complete operas, they are hearing all the other roles around them, not just singing their role straight through in a studio. Recently, Anita Lyons was asked to do a *Cavalleria Rusticana* staged in three rehearsals. She did it with us last year. It was on book, but she knew it well enough and was comfortable with it and had it in her voice well enough so that she was able to say, yes. This has happened a lot. Within the Forum we do concert versions of the operas. Somebody like you will say, "I don't know if this role is going to fit me but it's in my *Fach* and people tell me I should do it. Let me try it out in the New York Opera Forum. I don't have to spend all those hours memorizing because I don't know if it's right, but I'll try to get it into my voice and see how far I can take it and be able to perform it in front of people." This takes place in a non-pressure situation, unless you're at Lincoln Center.

*When did you begin to coach larger dramatic soprano voices?*

I guess it was in the eighties when I started coaching Tosca. Wagner has always been my absolute favorite composer; therefore, I always knew a lot of Wagner's repertoire even from just listening to it over and over. Then I went into Strauss.

*In what types of venues or programs did you work with these larger voices?*

Besides within the Forum, I worked with the great soprano, Johanna Meier, in her institute out in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Now that Birgit Nilsson is no longer with us, Johanna Meier is basically the world's most famous Wagnerian soprano. She's amazing to work with. She came to New York several years ago and we did a week-long masterclass together. I worked with her program for three years. She came to New York five years.

*Did you do fully-staged operas in South Dakota?*

We did smaller scene work that was fully staged and costumed. The repertoire varied – *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Tales of Hoffman*, and a couple of others I don't remember off the top of my head.

*What technical problems did you notice most often occurring with the larger voiced sopranos that you've worked with?*

Some don't sing with their natural voice. They try to sound like a big-voiced soprano. Other problems include forcing, lack of placement, singing in the throat, not letting the air carry the voice, not letting the resonators open-up, and not using the mask. Basically, all the things that *bel canto* technique would teach you. Unfortunately, too many vocal pedagogy teachers don't do that anymore and they tell you which muscle does what on which note, and it can drive a singer crazy because you can't be thinking of that stuff. Either you have the proper-sized voice, or you don't. By placing the voice correctly, you're going to find out what size voice you have and what's going to carry over an orchestra and what's not.

*What were some solutions you offered to help overcome these technical problems?*

I don't go into vocal technique. I do have a knowledge of it, but I don't like to step on voice teacher's toes.

*What about from the coaching standpoint?*

I try to get singers to relax and breathe a little bit more. There are certain things that I can do as far as voice technique goes that the singers don't realize I'm doing. I'll use phrases like, let your breath take you through that line, and the tendency will be to get out of the throat. Try to sing on the vowels and drop the consonants on top of the vowels. Try not to pronounce the consonants. Forming the consonants with your mouth and or tongue

usually gets a better line. The enunciation is strangely much better because the consonants don't wind up behind the foot lights of the stage. And somehow, the breath flows a lot easier and the mask is used and the resonators open, but I don't say it that way. I get around it other ways.

*What heavier repertoire have you studied and coached?*

I've pretty much done all of Wagner, Strauss, Verdi, and the *verismo* operas. The Mozart big voices are Vitellia, Elettra, and Donna Anna. I haven't tackled *Lohengrin* or *Tannhäuser* yet. I also haven't done the copyrighted Strauss, although the voices he has for those operas are lighter at that point.

*In your opinion, what are the vocal challenges for the Wagner, Verdi, Puccini, and Strauss operatic repertoire?*

For Wagner and Strauss it's strictly stamina. The operas are phenomenally written. You just sing with your own voice and you sing the lines they give you. There should be absolutely no problem. They fit beautifully into the voice. Verdi will kill you. Verdi is very awkward. Verdi did not write well for the voice. Verdi is very difficult to sing, and you need to be very careful otherwise you will kill yourself. The *verismo* is a little bit easier in that you don't have to be as exacting as you are in Verdi. There is a lot of room for *rubato* and a lot of room, for lack of a better term, sloppiness. And it's fine. It's the style and it's accepted and desired. You need to be careful not to blow yourself out trying to get over some conductor's orchestra who doesn't know how to temper the orchestra with his left hand. And the attitude basically should be, "You want to drown me out? Fine. I'm not going to lose my voice because you don't know how to use your left hand. Don't ask me to sing louder. Get that orchestra softer." And as far as bigger voices doing Mozart or Handel, they should sing themselves. Singing Mozart and Handel are basically like taking your voice lessons. You sing those notes and you can't help but improve.

*Did you notice a difference working with younger dramatic singers as opposed to older dramatic singers?*

Only in that their instruction is too exacting for the younger singers. Present day instruction is very specific. The singers don't need to know what muscle does what and which note to place and where to place it. It will mess them up. Nilsson's technique basically was support, breath, and mask. That's all a singer needs to know. Everything else the body is going to take care of by itself. The younger singers are just thinking too much. You just need to let it out there, keep the support, keep the column of air, and keep it all in the mask. It's all you need to do. It's like baseball – hitting a round ball with a round bat. It's hard to do. I'm not saying it's easy.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

No, absolutely not. Either you have it or you don't. You set your technique up properly, you sing, and you know if you have that kind of voice or placement that is going to carry over a hundred- piece orchestra. Don't try to force it. If you're a Mozart singer, you're a Mozart singer. It's fine. If you're a Verdi singer, you're a Verdi singer. Because you can do Aida doesn't mean you can do Brünnhilde. For instance, they are casting Mimi with young dramatics or dramatic sopranos now in Europe because you know you're in that quote unquote *Fach*, which is a word I hate. Every voice is totally unique and some roles you can handle and some roles you can't. If you're in the dramatic *Fach* and they cast you as Mimi, according to contract they can ask you to sing Sieglinde. And you know, those roles are two different animals. It should become apparent with proper technique what your voice can handle and what it can't. You just need to come to that realization. You're probably not going to come to that realization until you're in your thirties. That's the maturing level.

*What are some arias that you would suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

It just depends on the voice. It depends on the specific voice. I would stay away from the *Hochdramatischer* stuff until you are at least in your late twenties. Stay away from the early Verdi stuff until you're in your thirties, because that's the stuff that's going to kill you. Try opening up some of the bigger Puccini if you want to take a plunge. I wouldn't start with *Turandot* but *Tosca*, *Fanciulla*, and *Butterfly*. Try those out because those are on the way to the *Hochdramatischer* stuff.

*Do you feel it's better to start with the Italian repertoire as opposed to the German?*

Probably, because the Italian language was written to music. But I always go back to Handel because you can sing Handel in any voice you wish to. You can take a lot of those arias and sing it big and dramatic. You can sing it very lightly. Handel's a great way to experiment and to find out where your niche is.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

It depends on their background and what roles have been done previously. You can't jump in and sing a big Wagnerian role and you can't jump in and sing Elektra. It needs to be a progression because you need to know how much voice you can give, how secure your technique is, and constantly be able to monitor if you are hurting yourself. You can sing any of those big repertoire pieces with proper *bel canto* technique. Wagner wrote for *bel canto* singers and since he put the orchestra under the stage, it was muted. Wagner basically wrote big chamber music. So, with proper *bel canto* technique you should be able to get over the orchestra and sing it the way Wagner wanted it. You don't have to blast. You need to be monitoring yourself absolutely every second, and if you feel uncomfortable at all, you need to stop and say, "What's making me uncomfortable?" Go for anything but just be careful.

*In summary, please name the top three pedagogical issues that you've noticed in the dramatic sopranos.*

One problem I see being taught is a high soft palate. That will choke you and that will also make you sing flat, eventually taking a third off your top. You might disagree. Singing in the throat is another one, trying to over-pronounce and produce the voice as if you had a microphone in front of you. If you over pronounce right in the front of your mouth, most of the consonants are going to get lost on your side of the footlights. If you sing on the vowels and the air, and drop the consonants on top, those consonants are going to fly out.

*Regarding the soft palate, do you mean over-extending it?*

Absolutely. High soft palate translates into stopping the column of air from going through your body through the soft palate and into the mask. It can constrict the throat. The nasal port needs to be left a little open, so the air will vibrate through.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding a successful career?*

When you feel you are solid enough don't wait for perfection because it will never exist. Strive for it but it never happens. When you feel solid enough with your big five arias just go out there and sing for anybody and everybody. Don't wait too long. Be wise in choosing an agent. There are several agents out there who will sign just about anybody who auditions for \$150 a month and will get you like two auditions for the year. I understand the agents taking something. Certainly, they need to make a living, too. There are also a lot of agents who will have a smaller roster and will be very specific with what they're looking for. They don't double or triple up on a certain voice type because there is not enough work. Find those who will take a small retainer or at least charge for advertising and clerical work. Expect that they are taking you on because they believe they can get you work and will take a percentage of whatever you make. Those are the ones that are going to work for you.

*Is there any other information you feel would be helpful regarding this topic?*

Keep the pedagogy out of it. If you're a voice teacher, keep the pedagogy to yourself. Just teach the basics. In the old days, the great voice teachers would have their students come in and say, "Sing this passage. No, no, sing it again. No, no, sing it again. That's right, do it again. Do it again." Well, what did I do? "Well, never mind what you did, that was correct. Just repeat that." All the great voice teachers did that. And you don't have to worry about thinking about what you did right and what you did wrong in miniscule technological situations. Remember the sensation. It's very basic stuff. That way thoughts of technical aspects do not get in your way when you're performing. And there's always the teacher you can call up and say, "Okay, I forgot what this felt like. Let's do it again in my next lesson." I played in a lot of studios and one teacher told me, "Well, I have to

think of new things to teach the students otherwise I'll give them everything I know in five lessons. They won't come back and I need to make money. And she is still teaching. A teacher should be more of a monitor than teaching miniscule specifics. I think it frees up the student because it lets them sing. As a coach, a singer will sing through something and ask for specific notes. No, let's let it develop because if I give you specific notes, that's my interpretation. If you let it develop for a few weeks, it's going to wind up being yours. We don't have a lot of vocal uniqueness now because everything is white bread. A lot of singers sound the same. It used to be you could drop the needle on the record and you knew within five seconds who that singer was. They were unique. We are losing a lot of that uniqueness. And I think it's due to the pedagogy. It's due to the fact that everybody's kind of a robot doing exactly the same thing. The universities want this little perfect white bread vanilla-type voice. And we're getting a lot of that. So, I go back and listen to Nilsson and Tebaldi and maybe they had imperfections, but man, they were exciting and wonderful. I think that's a lot of what's missing from today's performing. I also include Johanna Meier in that group. You can drop the needle on her and I can tell you in two seconds that it is her. She has a very unique voice. It has been said that there is no room at the very top right now, but there's a lot of room on the rung right below. This is because there's a lot of mediocrity out there singing in the big houses. There are those few at the top that you can't unseat, but if you can get close to the top, you are going to be working forever.

**Michael Strauss: phone interview on June 21, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your music/coaching journey.*

I came to it as a concert pianist and I started with art song, not opera. The reason I came to it through opera was because I needed a job. The very first coaching that I ever did was through a répétiteur for *Madame Butterfly*. It was early on but my connection to opera was not the usual Mozart or Handel but the much bigger Puccini works. I guess I got used to the talent of a larger opera. After I finished studying, the first job I had was a choral répétiteur.

*Briefly describe what your career looks like right now.*

I work full-time at two conservatories at both graduate and undergraduate levels. I do a lot of ad hoc and freelance work. I also coach for the IPAI program, which generally does not involve dramatic sopranos.

*When did you begin to coach larger dramatic soprano voices?*

My first coaching job was for *Madame Butterfly*, so I got used to the idea. The person that I collaborated with most was a dramatic soprano by the name of Joyce Barton. She sang at Covent Garden, Glyndebourne, and New York Opera. She specialized in things like Senta and Tosca. I did concerts with her, as well. I had to scale down my expectations of the voice after meeting with her.



*In what types of venues or programs have you worked with larger voices?*

I did some work with a big opera house in Capetown. It was with little kids performing art form. They had a big opera house and I did work with the répétiteur with that. I also worked with them in large halls in a university setting. It was a very large hall called the Great Hall which seated something like 2,000 people. But mostly I worked with them in opera houses of medium to large capacity.

*What technical problems did you notice most often occurring with the larger voiced sopranos?*

Often, the voice that seemed not in shape when it was up close was heard very well in the house. Your perception of what happens in a smaller place is not necessarily what's going to happen in a larger place. One gets used to that. It's a little bit like seeing a painting on a large scale and thinking it looks awful here but the perspective will change things.

*What about pedagogical problems?*

The range extreme is very different. First of all, dramatic starters and larger starters tend to go to the chest break much more easily. By that I mean readily, not necessarily more technically. They like savoring the chest voice much more often than other voices do. Generally, the chest speaking voice is much more pronounced. That's just an anecdotal thing. You can draw technical conclusions to that, but it is something that has been proven to my own ear. Second of all, the range on top is much less forgiving. Some don't know whether it will make it that particular day. There is a risky element to singing high notes in voices of that caliber. Also, sometimes dramatic voices never get to the point where they can truly sing piano. I had to get used to that.

*What were some solutions that you offered to help overcome these technical issues?*

First of all, I would advocate that the idea of singing softly is sometimes just an idea. For example, start a phrase softly if it is in a comfortable part of the voice. Use as much opportunity to sing softly in areas of the voice that is easily done. Also, if there is a phrase where a high note needs to be soft, then start the rest of the phrase with the color and then the high note is going to pop up. Then you've given dramatic intention to the phrase without having kept it all at the same level. The general rule is sing softly when you can, when it's easy, and technically manageable. The chest register issue should be addressed when appropriate and depends on the approach. The context makes things very different. For example, if you're coming from a place that is high and you suddenly pop into the chest, you're going to make that transition obvious. Depending on context, I would recommend that people mix a little bit more. They may make a sacrifice to sing one note that would be more comfortable in the chest in the mix instead. Then and only then switch to chest. I do not advocate this for lighter voices. I ask them to mix a little

earlier because that way the chest can be strengthened. In terms of the high notes, that's a tactic. Do you understand what I mean by that?

*Can you explain?*

I would not have an overall strategy for how to deal with that problem. But I would have certain tactics that depended on the ability of the performer and the context of the piece. That's on a case by case basis. Sometimes I ask them to practice half a step higher and to sing the whole piece higher just to get used to a slightly higher head placement. It may also lighten the sound. It depends on the performer.

*What heavier repertoire have you studied and coached?*

I would say about ten Verdi operas. I've worked on almost all the Puccini. The one opera that stands out that is a little unusual is *Fanciulla* because it is a strange mixture of voices for both the tenor and the soprano. Everything seems to be more Wagnerian. It's one of the most dramatic unique ways of using the voice. The tenor is a little more ironic than another Puccini opera that he's written. But, Puccini is not the largest music for dramatic voices. In fact, very few of the Puccini operas are truly dramatic in that sense. *Tosca* and *Manon Lescaut* might be, but the popular operas are not that dramatic.

*What about your Verdi experience?*

The range is very large with Verdi. Verdi is a very tricky area to cover. In certain operas, the color of the voice is *spinto* and one has to get the sense of what that means. Then we have Wagner. Wagner is Wagner. I wouldn't even call it dramatic. I would just call it big. It is said that Wagner's favorite composer was Bellini. I'm not sure if that source was trying to make a point or not but it isn't anything but size of the voice. There's very little evidence of any Bellini material.

*In your opinion, what are the vocal challenges of Verdi and Wagner opera?*

Well, if you sing Verdi he's a direct descendant of *bel canto* and Donizetti. This means that the voice needs to move. You have to sing a scale at any given moment. One of the difficult things about that is suddenly you're asked to go from the very dramatic standpoint in the voice to suddenly being able to do scales and trills. That is the hardest part for any Verdi. Of course, people do these roles far too young. Even a role like Gilda is heavier than most sopranos would like to do. You never know because they start off singing kind of normal and lightly. It is not a little coloratura role. It's a full lyric. Every Verdi opera is a study in a different type of singing. That is the hardest thing about Verdi in that there is no one type. The way that he used to work was to sink the character into the voice type. He would write every voice in the character a little differently. *Traviata* is three different voice types because you want to show the aging of the voice. You have a completely different set of circumstances to judge how to deal with that whereas a lot of later Verdi works are one color of the voice all the way through. And by then he also

developed a certain style of how to carve the character into the opera by means of meter, key, and compound tempo. The organization of the voice is different because of his own style of writing formerly in an aria, cavatina, cabaletta style. And when you start something like *Otello* it's very, very different. There's not a single formal *bel canto* set piece in it. So, Verdi is Verdi. There is no one like Verdi. It's also like Beethoven. The composer that you meet in the beginning of their life is very different from the composer that you see at the end. So, I would say there is no one given strategy for that. But flexibility to understand the different roles and the ability of the voice to move around is important. The thing about Verdi is that most of it involves coloratura but when you get to the end of it there is none at all.

*So, what about the vocal challenges with the Wagner heroines?*

Don't over-sing the middle because it's a long haul. One tends to think of Wagner in a very specific way and whenever you hear the word Wagner it's almost like an arm wrestling challenge that you have to avoid. Sometimes he can be quite intimate. The thing about the Wagner orchestra is that the reason it is large is not because he uses more but that he can write very complex things in the score. The reason why there are four flutes is not because he wants four times the sound but because he can write four-part harmony with those and isolate them. He tended to write in little sections of the orchestra and he liked the flexibility. I would think because of the type of personality he was he wanted to prove that he could harness the largest forces even if he didn't use them. He had the world's most expensive amplifier and never used it to full capacity. There is also a difference between mezzo and soprano in Wagner. It's a very thin line. Often the sopranos and mezzos sing in a very similar tessitura.

*Do you feel each of the Wagner roles should be approached differently just like the Verdi roles?*

There's a more predictable path in Wagner. His development was not so much about the voice as it was about the music and the harmony. It was also his sense of form, as well. The longer he wrote the less likely he was to write arias. It's more about the musical development and orchestral development. The way that the voice is developed is significant but not as much as in Verdi. Verdi tended to look for a specific character in the music. Then he tried to etch it into the score.

*Do you notice a difference working with younger dramatic sopranos?*

I don't notice a difference in terms of the age. It depends on the soprano. The biggest thing is that they need a long time to warm up. Maybe younger sopranos don't know that. Older sopranos warm up more quickly because they have more skill in doing so. I can't say that there's one trend in general.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

No. I honestly believe that dramatic voices should be trained the same way. Train a lot in *bel canto* and work technique on the onset to go straight into the appropriate *Fach*. Singing Wagner and Verdi so soon in the career makes bad habits. The first singers who sang Verdi and Wagner were very light voices and they came from a repertoire that was much earlier. Then they developed into the kind of style that we are using today. At the same time, holding the voice back that was to sing heavy is also dangerous. So that required a good teacher to know what the balance should be. The teachers who send their students to much heavier repertoire than they should caused their students to be scared of the heavier repertoire. It holds them back.

*Do you feel it's best for dramatic voices to study with dramatic teachers?*

It does not matter. For a good teacher, *Fach* doesn't matter at all. In fact, quite the opposite. Studying with a teacher simply because they sang the repertoire is not always the wisest thing. There are teachers who are sound pedagogues and they have nothing to do with it. But at the same time, I do believe that working with people who know the repertoire is good. They're not necessarily expert teachers.

*What are some arias that you would suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study as they're starting their journey?*

I would say anything that is short. It depends on the singer. I wouldn't say I have one set of arias that would be good for a young dramatic person to sing. Frankly, I would always recommend people start off with *Fiordiligi*, *Donna Elvira*, and *Elettra*. Some of the arias sit high in the voice which depends on the voice type. I would see where the voice turns over. Is it a mezzo that's becoming a soprano? It depends.

*Do you have any suggestions on a progression of operatic roles?*

It's a good idea to look for a soprano that's close to your voice type and see what roles they have done. I just simply see the arc of their roles. Now today that's very hard. So, I would always suggest that you go back thirty years and look at the voice types comparable to yours. Nowadays, singers use skillful manipulation, so you can get any voice type to sing any role because it's all about marketability. People sing a very wide range of roles. Perhaps it is too wide.

*In summary, what are the top three pedagogical issues you've encountered with dramatic sopranos?*

As I said before, they are dynamic ability, dynamic control, flexibility, and registration.

*As a coach, what advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Sing as lyrically as possible. If you're a dramatic soprano, nothing will stop that from happening. But if you sing too heavily at too young of an age, that will stop it from happening.

*Is there any other information you feel would be helpful to offer on this topic?*

There are tons of articles written all about this. It's mind boggling to choose. There's nothing that I can add to that. I would say to get the advice of conductors more than anything else. Talk to the ones that work with large voices and conduct Wagner operas. Listen to the advice they give and things that they do. Do this with certain dramatic singers, as well. The more famous the name, the less likely you are to get anything good from them.

### **Ellen Rissinger: Skype interview on June 29, 2016**

*Briefly describe the beginning of your music career and how you became a vocal coach.*

I always wanted to be a singer. My mom was a musician. She was a pianist and a high school music teacher. They shoved me out on stage in shows when I was two-years-old. There was never a time that I remember without any kind of music and I was always playing the piano. When I was twelve or so a concert pianist heard me and said, "You can carry a tune but you're a pianist." That was the first time anybody had ever indicated I should not become a singer and that I should be a pianist. Then I started taking piano seriously and didn't know what I could do with a degree in piano. But, I went to school as a piano major anyway. I went to Carnegie Mellon and I hated the teacher. I ended up getting switched to a man named Ralph Zitterbart my second year and he was a vocal coach. He heard me in the hallways speaking Spanish with some of the Spanish students and just imitating the sounds that I would hear. He said, "You have really good ears. You should take French." And then he said, "You should play for singers." The second I knew that I could play the piano for singers and not be alone in a practice room all day long I knew that was it. I never wanted to play solo music. I always wanted to be a vocal coach.

*What does your career look like currently?*

I am on the music staff of the Semperoper in Dresden, Germany, which is one of the top ten opera houses in the world. It is one of the top four in Germany. I work with people such as Anna Netrebko who was here for the *Lohengrin*. I played a New Year's Eve concert with Renee Fleming. In the summer I go and work at a lot of summer programs here in Europe with students. So, I work pretty much with everyone from beginners all the way up.

*When did you begin to coach larger, dramatic soprano voices?*

The first time I started that I was at Glimmerglass. The first time I heard a large voice was a tenor. I told Kathy Kelley, "I don't know if I can really coach him. I can't really

hear what's going on because it's so loud." And she said, "Don't worry you'll get deaf in a few years and then you'll be able to coach." I started laughing and she said, "I'm not kidding." That's kind of where I realized working with bigger voices would be interesting. But she's right. After a while some things that are very loud aren't noticeable as being loud anymore. You get sort of used to it and then you to start to hear the partials better once you have a little bit of deafness.

*Can you describe the venues or programs where you work with the larger, dramatic soprano voices?*

At the beginning, it was places like Glimmerglass and summer programs. Now I would say it's in the operas themselves here in Dresden.

*What technical problems do you notice most often occurring with the larger voiced sopranos?*

I'm going to answer this in two parts. With the younger sopranos it's more a matter of trying to find a focus. The voice tends to have a little more unsteadiness because they don't know exactly how to get under it all the time. So, the vibrato tends to be a little too broad. I think that's the biggest problem. I would also say with the younger singer that they're never sure exactly what repertoire to sing. As a bigger voice, you don't want to be singing the repertoire right away. You don't want to be singing *Turandot*. You need to sing something that's age appropriate and that's helpful to learn your technique on the way up. And it's hard to figure out exactly what those roles are for every voice because they're all so different.

*What are some solutions that you often offer in a coaching to overcome those problems?*

As a coach, I tend to work mostly with the language and with trying to find the musical value of it. I mostly try to figure out what the vowel is that is going to sing best on that pitch for that singer and try to make sure that they're singing a vowel. I find a lot of times, especially if somebody speaks a language, they don't think about what's going on in the background. So, it's often good to go from both directions. I think everyone should be able to speak the languages and I think fluency is a big help. But sometimes by being fluent we forget we are still singing vowels that aren't necessarily language. They're vowels sometimes. Focus on getting the parts of it all together and not worry about the whole until the parts are all together. Does that make sense?

*Yes. It makes a lot of sense to me because I've coached with you before. I know exactly what to expect.*

And I just realized that I said I was going to answer that in two parts. With the older singers, I find that they tend to overblow because the voice is so big. They do have so much sound and sometimes when you overblow the overtone series gets pushed flat.

*Can you talk about some of the heavier repertoire you've studied and coached?*

It's hard to talk about it. I now have so many operas in the repertoire. The first one I ever did was *Turandot*. As a young coach, they don't often give you the big, heavy repertoire. I was doing concert work and I was playing *Turandot* for the Kentucky Opera with Caroline Whisnat as the soprano. She had some fun tricks. She would start facing the back of the stage and then turn as she was singing so that the crescendo would get even louder to the audience. She had some great stage tricks to help the voice sound bigger than it is. When I first started, I wasn't sure what to do. I was listening more and trying to figure out what I was hearing as opposed to trying to fix things right away, which I tend to do with smaller voices. I tend to hear the problems sooner. With the bigger voices, I try to hear what's happening. When Marjorie Owens was here for a couple of seasons I remember thinking the vibrato was too fast in the beginning. But, the more I heard her the more her technique got solid. It was so neat to hear things develop over the years for her having heard her at the beginning when she got here. I know she had a lot of background working with the Chicago Lyric Program and the Houston Program.

*In your opinion, what are the vocal challenges for this vocal repertoire?*

I think with Verdi it's often tessitura. The Verdi repertoire sits in a different part for the heavier sopranos. I would also say a hard thing in Verdi is the style. You have to remember that he comes out of Bellini and Donizetti. The repertoire is already big. You don't have to make it bigger. We did a *Manon Lescaut* and the soprano who was this huge name was pushing flat all the time. She was always approaching everything from the bottom. Every note was approached from the bottom to make it bigger and heavier. Because of that it just made it sound older. It sounded flat. The overtones rang wrong and then the high notes came out wrong. I think with Strauss, the hardest thing is the amount of time and the amount of energy it takes. When you think about an Elektra or a Salome they are on stage singing pretty much 90 minutes the whole time. And there's no let up. There's no break and it's just a matter of having enough stamina to get through it. When it comes to Wagner, it's an Italian approach. I think in a lot of ways Wagner is lower than the others. So, you hear a lot of mezzo sopranos who turn into sopranos sing the heavier dramatic Wagner roles. Then you have the problem of their approaching it as a mezzo as opposed to remembering that now they're singing soprano and having to come at it from a different angle. Always approach it from the *bel canto* style.

*Have you noticed a difference working with younger dramatic sopranos?*

Yeah, I'm working with one right now. She's great but I know she's a little frustrated and doesn't know what roles to play. She's only twenty-six and she's in our young artist's program and it's hard for them to give her roles in the full operas because her voice isn't old enough yet to do the things that she should be singing. So, she and I are going to try and learn an opera a month so that she develops some repertoire that she could go out and sing. In two years she'll be able to sing things like Marie from *The Bartered Bride*. I think there again the issue becomes the vibrato and the fact that the body hasn't grown into the

voice yet. So, the voice is almost too big for the technique. It's a matter of giving the body time to develop and not getting too frustrated. It's also important not to try and sing too small. There was one woman I worked with who brought the Contessa from the *Marriage of Figaro*. Someone had told her that she was way too loud and she had to sing everything soft. I said, "But that's not your voice. Your voice isn't that way and if you're a bigger voice Contessa, then you'll have to sing it with the bigger voice." Otherwise there is no point. She's now singing in Merola and doing all the heavy repertoire.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Yes, I think dramatic voices in general need people that understand what's going on with the dramatic voice. Big voices are different across the board. A dramatic tenor is different from a character tenor and is going to have different breaks and different problems with different ways of approaching everything. I would say the exact same thing for sopranos. It would be helpful to have somebody who really knows the differences between what's going on in each kind of voice. Whether they are that themselves or they're just a really good teacher that understands that is kind of a toss-up. But it's got to be somebody who sort of understands that there are differences and that not every singer is exactly the same.

*What are some arias that you would suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

I would head toward things like Marie in *The Bartered Bride*. I would head towards maybe some of Janáček's operas because I find that a lot of the bigger voices sound very beautiful in that when they're starting out. It keeps it light, but it also needs a fullness to it. I think the heavy Mozart characters like Elettra in *Idomeneo* or Vitellia in *Clemenza di Tito* and anything that gives you a chance to sing something fully is a good idea. Donna Anna is always good. Try Donna Elvira if Donna Anna doesn't feel good. Trying something along those lines to give you a chance to sing something heavier is great without the worry of a full Wagner orchestra under the voice.

*What progression of roles would you suggest for young dramatic sopranos to study?*

It's funny because I know a lot of large voice women say that Mozart doesn't feel good and I totally understand that. But I think it's good to start there because I feel like at least you can find the core of the voice. Then I would move on towards the Puccini roles. Also, try some of the French roles like *Louise's* "Depuis le jur" and those kinds of things. Start through the full lyric things and move on into the more dramatic things. They might try some Handel. Handel is always good for everybody. Even with the big voice it should have some flexibility. If you're doing Elettra in *Idomeneo* it has a lot of coloratura in it. It's hard but it's good for the voice. Even if you don't sing it well it will force the voice to move. Some people think their voice is too big to move around. Well, everybody's voice does something. And if you don't use it, you lose it.

*What about a progression of roles for more mature dramatic sopranos?*



If we're thinking German repertoire, start with Agathe in *Freischütz*, then move into Leonore in *Fidelio* and Sieglinde. Sieglinde isn't as high as Brünnhilde. Then go on into your Tristan's and Isolde's. Look at what is going on in the Wagner repertoire because there are many smaller roles that are easier to start with before moving into the bigger roles. When it comes to Italian I would say to start with something like *Manon Lescaut* or *Tosca* before moving into the heavier repertoire.

*Can you name the top three pedagogical issues you've encountered over the course of your coaching career and the solutions you offered to fix them?*

I think the vibrato tends to be a problem when the singers are young. The vibrato tends to be a little wild because the voice is too big for the technique. I try to keep things as pointed and as far in the front as I can. I think we spend a lot of time talking about space, but we don't spend enough time talking about getting things to the front. Keeping things in the front and opening the space are sort of my ways of going at it. The body isn't always ready to support enough. Then I go from a support angle of trying to keep the air flow constant. That's always tough. Also, they need to keep the cords together but that is not my realm as a coach. That is why I approach it from a vowel standpoint because the cords don't want to come together. So much is going on and so much air is going through the cords and the body is trying so hard to support that things can get trapped. In those cases, I do what I can to get the body to relax as much as possible and let things be as natural as possible without being forced. A lot of bigger voices hear their whole lives how big their voice is, and they try to do more to make it even bigger. I try to get away from that and tell them not to worry about whether it's big or small but just sing. I've also heard older dramatic sopranos approach the voice from the bottom instead of letting it soar over the top. Otherwise the vibrato rings in the wrong place and you hear the overtone series starting to pull flat. When you have it with the orchestra it also doesn't cut as well.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working toward a successful career?*

I would say try not to be in a hurry, which we all are. We all know that if you're not singing at the Met by the time you're twenty-five then you're a loser which is completely the wrong thing to be thinking. I think the best thing they can do for themselves is to get teachers and coaches that they trust and to find a place that they trust to not give them too much. There are a lot of good young artist programs out there that are trying to help. I know Dolores Zajak has a big program for dramatic voices. There are places that are trying to find ways to help this move along. If somebody tells you something that feels wrong, then get another opinion. It doesn't mean that they're wrong. Maybe they are right and it just didn't work out for you. Finding the voices that are going to help you figure out how to use your instrument the best is the only way to do it. Find people that don't push it too hard. Remember that the first time somebody offers you an Isolde is probably not the time to take it. When somebody's offering you a role give it two years.

*Is there any other information that you feel would be helpful to offer regarding this topic?*

Most of us think we can learn an opera in two months. I've had colleagues that have said to me, "It's a good thing I went to blah, blah, blah and they taught us how to learn a role in two weeks." It's ridiculous. It's not worth it. The one mezzo that I had worked with that was moving to the dramatic repertoire was learning roles two years in advance. I mean she had them down solid two years in advance so that the voice could develop into it long before she ever had to sing it. And I think that's always the best way to approach it especially with someone with a bigger voice. If you're thinking of an Isolde and you're thinking you've got three hours of a four and a half opera to sing, you don't want to be learning that at the last minute. You want to learn small pieces of it early so that you can develop into it.

*So, you think it is a good idea to learn the operas now to be ready for them in the future?*

Yes. If you think the body's going to be ready for it in the next five years, I would start working on it. You're probably not going to get offered Isolde five years out. You're going to get offered Isolde next season or the season after that. That's the kind of thing you want to sit in the body. The body develops around it. I would love it if there were more things out there for singers to have where they get to sing and they don't feel so pushed. I feel like it would be healthier all the way around. You don't want the first Salome you ever sing to be on the stage at the Met. We have a small opera house here in Dresden. I coach for them because I went to one of their performances and was so frustrated with the diction. I said, "I'm not going to ask for any extra money, but I will never let your singers go out there uncoached." I feel like those of us who are in the industry and who are making it and have a little bit of time should be giving back like that. I think it's everyone's duty to make this as easy for everybody as possible because it's a pretty impossible business. There's also a small company in my hometown that does one full opera a year. It's some pressure but it's Redding, Pennsylvania. It's not Dresden, Atlanta Opera, or Pittsburgh Opera. It's not even a B house. It's a little hometown where everybody who is going is basically your families. They want it to be easy. It's great to be able to sing without having to cut over 80 pieces in an orchestra. It's not a full orchestra. When you come back to that in two or three years, you're going to be like, "Oh my God, this is a whole new ball game."

**Arlene Shrut: in person interview on July 27, 2016**

*Could you give me a little bit of background on how you got involved in music?*

Well, I've been involved in music from when I was a little kid. I anchored on to the idea of the piano when I was two-years-old going to an orchestral concert and hearing a concerto. I pointed and I said, "that," to my parents and it took many years until I got an instrument. I can't even remember learning how to read music. It went from not reading at all to seriously reading. Then, every Sunday growing up and through high school I was

at the Symphony hearing great master works under fabulous German conductors. I didn't know I was going to be in music until I was a junior in high school. I was going to be in religious education but loved to play and then went on to school and fell in love with *Lieder*. That was one of the first things that happened when I went to school. While all my friends were studying their concerti, I started to learn languages alongside the singers. So, I would say I feel more like a singer. But I have that slot where my heart is. I think it's so amazing that each of you has this extraordinary voice that's never been before, and it will never be again.

*So, the span of your career so far has been predominantly coaching singers?*

Yes.

*Where are some places that you have done this other than privately?*

Well, I've done a lot in the schools where I went. I earned two degrees at Eastman and then went to Music Academy of the West. I was fourteen summers in Aspen as a vocal coach and opera coach and I taught a Mozart class there. I also did things at USC where I got my doctorate. But, I'd say I've always loved the big German stuff. The German stuff was very clear to me that that was going to be it. I got a Fulbright to Germany and that's where I studied. I was lucky that I got to be mentored by the head. She was a full lyric soprano but her husband, Beckman, was also a coach at the house. So, through that I started to learn some bigger repertoire when I was living in Germany. I also started attending performances of Wagner and Strauss. Then, I met my husband who kind of alternately was trained as a baritone. He came from the bass baritone side into *Helden* baritone life and we did *Fidelio* together for the first time. Then he was learning *The Ring* because he wanted to go and audition in Europe. So, I took on learning *The Ring* with him and through that was prepared when I got the invitation to do the Wagner *Ring* in Arizona. That was a tremendous kind of exciting time for me because I'd never been part of a production that had all dramatic singers who were exactly suited to their roles. A lot of them needed big time brush up and some of them just needed help learning the roles after I got there. So, that's kind of what it's been since then. I'm just fascinated with that whole thing.

*What does your career look like currently?*

I still teach at Julliard and Manhattan School of Music. I think I mentioned to you I'm launching a big project which celebrates using the piano as an orchestral substitute especially in intimate venues where they wouldn't be able to fit an orchestra. So that is a very, very strong thrust for me now. I've also wanted to teach more collaborative piano. We'll see whether or not that's possible. I launched our first work shop in collaborative piano for the first time at the Atlantic Music Festival and it was very well received. They're considering whether or not to start a program there.

*Can you specifically say when you started working with larger dramatic sopranos in a professional setting?*

I'd say just as a freelancer in New York. I played for a lot of different people's audition classes early on so these were people who were sometimes getting ready for audition tours in Europe. Sometimes they would be singing at City Opera, at the Met, or they just wanted to learn roles. After people knew that I'd done *The Ring* then people would come specifically to work on roles from *The Ring*. Since then it's been just word of mouth.

*You mentioned Arizona and the Atlantic Music Festival as some places that you have worked with larger voices. Are there any other specific programs you worked with including the time you spent in Germany?*

No. No, I did not do any summer programs when I was in Germany. I also never worked in a house. It was never my desire to work in a house. I think I have too much of the performer in me. So, I'd say my career is about individual development. That's what I'm very interested in. Every place that I go now I carve out a niche in that. I enjoy working collaboratively with singers on recitals, as well. We work on their audition packages and how they put together a very effective package that shows all these different things about themselves and prognosticates what roles they should be singing ahead.

*Can you describe the technical and/or pedagogical problems you notice specifically working with dramatic sopranos?*

I feel like there's a problem when people realize they're not going to be the young artist's program prototype. In the meantime, they work on growing their artistry and growing into their voice in a graceful way. There aren't too many arias that they're going to be singing that they can sing at that time. So, it's a matter of encouraging people to find larger song repertoire and more contained in terms of not so high or not so low. It's important not to press against those limits until the person is old enough to handle it. It varies person to person. As a coach, I've never had a teacher accuse me of interfering with technique. I would rather have a voice sing in to whatever their ability is as long as they're not pushing and it's resonant than a voice that holds back. I think that never sets a good basis to become a dramatic singer. Generally, I think dramatic singers don't sound very pretty when they start off in that repertoire. You have to get people used to the idea that it doesn't matter. Sometimes it's how a voice blooms in the house that doesn't need any more development. It just needs to give the person an opportunity to sing into a big space. That's worth it if people have to save the money to do it and plop themselves in some big empty space and sing there and stick a recorder out there and see what that's like. For other people, it's just constantly going back and forth between growing the great notes in their range both up and down while always solidifying the middle without it being so heavy that they can't access the top. I even notice among professional singers that there are different ways of handling high notes. Some people kind of tend to go searing and direct. Other people kind of do a bungee launch into their high notes. I'm not sure if that's a technical thing or just like an individual trust factor and knowledge that

certain dramatic sopranos will know when to do that. That I don't know. That's kind of a teacher's rump, but I never judge those techniques as right or wrong. If they sound comfortable and the notes are committed and fully resonant it doesn't matter how they got there. I think that about Wagner singing, too. The voices that are meant to do it are the ones where it's not a big deal and where it's kind of easy.

*What are some solutions you offer as a coach to help with these issues?*

I wouldn't. I'm not a meddler. But, I will ask if it is something you and your teacher are actively working on. If they say, "No, I haven't asked my teacher" I'll say that I'd appreciate if you can go back and do this. I feel like the piece is great for you but until that gets worked out you're not going to be able to audition with it. Sometimes they say that their teacher doesn't want to talk about it or doesn't know it. Then I would ask if they have considered consulting with other people. There are other people who are dramatic voices themselves who get it or just have a knack for it. They know how to feed that out.

*Do you ever find that offering a dramatic or language solution is helpful?*

Absolutely. I'll deal with vowels any old time. I also work a lot from how to manage breath energy moving through a phrase. That's important. I think that's something that a teacher will cover. It doesn't fall into what you do with your support, throat, tongue, and articulator. It's more about the purity of the vowel in the bottom two thirds of the voice that I'll be specific with. The idea of finding the best relaxation or modification as one ascends is important. I think that's a vowel issue, as well. I like putting it back on the teacher and I am always growing my store of teachers who I feel are good at this.

*Have you worked with most of the heavier repertoire?*

Well, I've done a lot of it in terms of arias since I haven't worked in a house and it isn't a personal goal of mine to work in a house. For example, people come to me to work on the role of Elektra. I'll tell them we can work on the aria but then suggest another coach for them to work with on the role. Josh Greene is a favorite person of mine to recommend. I feel like he's coached and conducted a lot of different places, loves that repertoire, and does a lot of that repertoire at the Met. I think it's wonderful to coach with people who are in those houses so you can be a possible last-minute replacement if needed. The only complete operas in my repertoire are *The Ring* and *Fidelio*. On my own I've worked on *Freischütz*.

*In your opinion, what are the vocal challenges related to Wagner, Strauss, and Verdi, for any singer?*

It's important to do the right roles at the right time of their development. They aren't all equal. We see a lot of mezzos who eventually grow into dramatic sopranos. Then some dramatic sopranos will go into more dramatic mezzo roles at the end of their career. It's difficult to time out those transitions. It's hard to know if that role is going to be good for

you since productions are planned so much earlier now. Let's say you do an audition for Brünnhilde, and then all of a sudden, the high B's and C's are not working as well. What do you do to plan that far in the future? A few people like Nina Stemme and Christine Goerke are in their forties and they're settled on that repertoire. I think it's a little scary to do it a little earlier. I've noticed that the Brünnhilde in the Arizona Opera production I did isn't singing much. I never hear about her. So, either she lost interest in it or she just didn't make it. Also, situations arise like what happened to Christine Brewer. She probably got over-scheduled and had to cancel Brünnhildes in New York.

*Have you noticed a difference working with younger singers as opposed to the ones with more experience?*

I feel like from a technical viewpoint it can vary with singer readiness. I think it is affected by the consistency that one gets by being out there and doing the roles. The rehearsal process is also a factor. One of the things that was astounding to me as we worked on *The Ring* was there were ten hours of rehearsal a day. How do you balance singing enough that you have your endurance up versus over singing so that you lose the blossom of the voice? It's very tricky. Identifying which rehearsals to sing and which rehearsals to mark is also challenging. Marking must be done in a healthy way.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require specialized training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

In my observation, I haven't noticed that. I think it's just like another dramatic voice. Sometimes, depending on the voice type, it can be harder to get a specific additional note or a real comfort into pure chest or chest mix.

*What are some arias you would suggest if you had a young dramatic soprano asking you for repertoire advice?*

I think I'd have to find out first what their comfort is in the wheel base and what high notes they like to sing. I would base my suggestions on that. Things like Sieglinde are an easy choice because it doesn't have a big extension either high or low. I think Ariadne is in that grouping. I think *Freischütz* is in that grouping. I'd probably do something like the "Wesendonck Lieder." You have to find the right Mozart to work as a dramatic. It probably would be Donna Anna or it could be Vitellia. You have to be careful. There's a great thing that Jan DeGaetani said years ago that I've found to be true. He said, "If you're musical you will unconsciously manipulate what you need to do to make it sound like what your mind's eye says the piece demands." That's what's dangerous...holding back, lightening the voice, not using muscles, and not using breath flow.

*Do you think it's important for a young dramatic in their thirties to begin learning all the repertoire and coaching it and singing it even before they're being paid to do it?*

Sure, getting it in their wheelhouse and seeing what is comfortable is fine. I think it's a little bit like going shopping. You can't know how well something is going to suit you before trying it on.

*We talked about technical issues earlier. If you had to list the top three pedagogical issues that you have noticed with dramatic sopranos, what would they be?*

I don't know if it's pedagogical. I think it's more the patience to just be where one is at. It's just the biggest thing.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

Learn as much of the repertoire that is comfortable for you. Find opportunities to start building the roles so that you would be able to jump in to a situation if needed. I think most people are going to go over and get a *Fests* contract in Germany in a smaller house and grow up from there either to bigger *Fests* or *Guests*. Another possibility is to be a cover in one of the big houses in America. Those are the only opportunities, right? And how many of the houses in America do it? Five or six do the big repertoire. I know a lot of people who want to be dramatic singers but don't want to leave America. I tell them good luck, but not in a disparaging way. You have to be at the place where they're doing more of it. You have to be willing to go where the work is because it's very specific. Everybody says there's not as much money in Europe as there used to be. But, there are hundreds of opera houses, right? It's also important to work on the language. You used to be able to get away with not speaking the language as an American. I don't think that will fly any more. Having a good working knowledge of the language allows you to plop down and be in that society.

*Is there any other information you feel would be helpful to offer about this topic?*

I think we're good. If something else comes to me, I'll pop you an e-mail. I wish I had more pedagogical information. In a way, maybe I don't because then I'd be tempted to use it.

### **Josh Greene: in person interview on August 27, 2016**

*Briefly describe how you became a vocal coach.*

I studied piano, voice, and conducting in college. While I was in college I taught piano to young kids and I remember one day just saying, "I don't want to do this the rest of my life." I was also accompanying a vocal studio of some singers who recommended me to help them with the repertoire and I realized that what I wanted to do was work with adult singers. And that's essentially how it happened.

*What are you doing currently in music?*

I work at the Metropolitan Opera as assistant conductor. My duties there include prompting, playing rehearsals, coaching principal artists, and occasionally playing continuo in the performances. I'm also on faculty at Mannes College of Music. I have twenty to twenty-five students every year that I coach there. I also coach privately.

*When did you begin working with larger dramatic soprano voices?*

The teacher who I first played for was somebody who was interested in dramatic voices, so I actually started pretty early. He was one of those who felt that it was more harmful to give smaller repertoire to bigger voices than it was to give repertoire that was too big. I don't think it was all that successful but most of the time he was giving *Aida* and giving *Tannhäuser* to younger students rather than giving them Zerlina and Adina. I got exposed to that repertoire fairly early in my career.

*Could you name the venues or the programs that you worked with the larger dramatic soprano voices over your career?*

For most of my career I worked privately here in New York City. And then twelve years ago I got hired at the Met so I started working there. I've done *Tristan* there and I've done *Meistersinger* there. I've done *Der fliegende Holländer* there. I've also done some of the stuff such as *Otello* and *Turandot*. I've done a lot of the operas there that required dramatic sopranos.

*What technical problems have you noticed most often occurring with the larger voiced sopranos?*

One I've noticed is that a lot of them don't have ample middle voices. While they may have some very loud notes at the top of the staff sometimes the voice doesn't come down with that kind of power, which you need in the dramatic soprano repertoire. I've also found that it is harder for them to negotiate going between the registers and sometimes that gets out of whack in their attempt to try and produce more sound where it might tentatively be weaker. Another problem is that some of them tend to have a stridency problem in the high voice in their attempt to make a very large sound. Some of them push and end up having a rather unpleasant sound rather than a beautiful sound.

*When you've noticed these problems do you ever offer any solutions to help overcome the technical aspects and if so, what would they be?*

I generally try to avoid teaching voice as a coach. I seem to be unusual in that regard, but I tend to tell singers what I hear. So, if it's flat, I tell them it's flat. If it's strident, I tell them it's strident. If it's breathy, I tell them it's breathy. I find it's easier because I work with so many singers who work with so many different teachers, some of whom use completely different vocabulary. Some of them have completely different ideas. I would say with a lot of them we would all agree about what the final sound sounded like but there are different paths to Rome and I prefer not to give technical advice that may in fact



be different from the way they've been asked to approach it by their own teacher. With some students whom I've known really, really well or who work with teachers who I have a very good relationship with, I might make a vocal suggestion as an experiment to see if it helped them. But generally, I try to provide more feedback of what it is sounding like and ask them, "What would your teacher ask you to do in order to fix that?" I would hope that if I keep saying, "Well, your A naturals are strident, are strident, are strident, are strident..." they would go to their lesson and say, "I listened back and I think he's right."

*You already mentioned a lot of heavier repertoire that you've done such as the Tristan and Meistersinger. What is your experience with Verdi and Strauss?*

I've done all the late Verdi operas at the Met. I prompted *Otello* last season. I've done *Aida* twice and I'm doing it again this season. I've done *Ballo in Maschera* there. *MacBeth* I've never done there but I've coached it many times. I've done *Tosca* and I've done *Turandot* many times at the Met and I've coached all the major *Elektra*, *Chrysothemis*, *Salome*, and *Dutchman*. I've coached all the Wagner heroines at one time or another and most of the tenor parts as well. I've worked a long time with James Morris. He came to me after he had done his *Wotans* but I taught him *Meistersinger* and *Schön in Lulu*. So, I've a lot of experience with that repertoire. At one point in my career I realized that my favorite music was the German music. It was my weakest language, so I got myself fluent in German. Actually, I have one thing I would encourage you to mention that sort of is critical. The Wagnerian libretti are philosophical statements. It's not like *Cavalleria* where you know the people are having affairs on each other and are jealous and angry. These are symbols of many aspects of philosophical life and you can't really do those roles justice if you don't have an understanding of what those texts really mean. Even the great philosophers still argue about what Wagner might be saying at any particular time and he is usually saying three or four different things at the same time. The different interpretations are not mutually exclusive. So, in order to have a handle on that you have to be fast on the language. You can get away with more I think in the Italian with having a general sense of what it means.

*What vocal challenges have you noticed within the Wagner, Verdi, bigger Puccini, and Strauss repertoire? It could be from a vocal standpoint or may even deal with the language.*

Well, the vocal challenge is stamina. The other is to have a lot of color in your singing while at the same time producing enough sound to fill a theater with the orchestra those operas have. Also, the same thing I said before about middle voice needs to be considered. It's very hard around G, A, and B above middle C in declamatory dramatic singing with full orchestra to be heard above that. I would say those are the main difficulties I see vocally. The other thing is that in the dramatic repertoire the kind of chest voice that one uses, for a lot of people, is different from an aesthetic point of view. For instance, while *Tosca* would sing in chest in a certain way in the Italianate style, that same style in German is a little bit different. It has to be more modulated and less raw in a Puccini opera. I've had people, unfortunately, who've learned it by listening to recordings

and came back and imitated it. So, you can't sing *Salome* if you're not a musician. You just can't do it. Also, in *Elektra* the rhythmic difficulties and the musical difficulties of those pieces require a superior musician, a superior ear, and hopefully somebody who has played an instrument in their life time orally. One of the problems with singers is that unfortunately many of them don't discover that they have instruments until they're young adults and those people may not have had a musical education before and that actually counts a lot against them. It's hard to catch up for somebody who has never played an instrument, who has never really heard a lot of classical music, and suddenly at nineteen wants to train to become an opera singer without any background. That person is up against a real disadvantage as opposed to somebody who has played Bach and Mozart since they were six and seven-years-old and know what it is to read music and know what it is to interpret music.

*Have you noticed a difference between working with the younger dramatic singers as opposed to the seasoned, older dramatic singers?*

Well, one of the disadvantages of the younger side is that you don't have the kind of life experience you need. I know *Salome* is fifteen-years-old and I know *Butterfly* is fifteen-years-old, but the librettists and composers were not fifteen-years-old. The sort of paradox with these characters is while they are fifteen-years-old they're also a universal age. There's no fifteen-year-old that I know of who can say what *Salome* says or what *Butterfly* says so it's sort of paradoxical in a way. They have to have an innocence and a youngness to them but at the same time they say things that belong to any age and any woman. So, I do find that some of the younger ones have not yet had life experience. When I was young and people told me that it really irritated me. But, it turned out that they were right. Obviously, someone like Nina Stemme who has been doing this a long time can model for you a difference in the experience level on stage and just vocally with how to handle the stress. I just heard her sing *Elektra* at the Met and it blew me away. First of all, it was accurate which often you don't get. I mean you listen to recordings and 75% of it is right, if that.

*I sang Chrysothemis last year and it is hard. It's a crazy score.*

Yeah, it's really difficult to sing all the right rhythms and all the right notes and make something of it while you're doing that. I mean, she was musically accurate. But often in *Elektra* if you mainly feel like they can get through it without disgracing themselves they've done a heroic job. She sang it with ease and her sound was beautiful all the time. It was never strident and the recognition scene was just breathtaking in just how beautifully she sang it. All the top notes to my ears sounded lush and warm and even in the angry, dramatic, and ugly character parts her voice never took on an ugliness. It was just a tour de force. I had never heard anything like that before in that role.

*Do you feel that dramatic sopranos require special training different from other categorizations of soprano voices?*

Well, I would say that that is true of every kind of voice. What you would teach for a coloratura soprano would be very much specific to a coloratura soprano and what you would teach to a lyric tenor or teach to a dramatic tenor. So, I think that you could say that that would be true for every type of voice. There are specifics to each one of those that have to be taught and that would be true of dramatic sopranos. But I don't think I would say that dramatic sopranos are in a category unto themselves, having a special kind of construction that no other voice would need for their own particular challenges and their own repertoire.

*What are some arias that you would suggest for the younger dramatic sopranos in their late twenties and early thirties to study as they're developing?*

I personally don't have problems with people that age starting to sing that repertoire. Some people think it's way too early. I don't think so. I mean, the obvious one that everyone starts with in German is Elsa. That one itself is not so taxing. A lot of people sing "Dich teure Halle" prematurely in my view. That's one I think I would wait on. Many people do the Arabella "Das was sehr gut." That one can be a good one. There's nothing from Isolde that I would start with. Maybe look at "Sachs mein Freund" for Eva. It is a younger part. You want as youthful of a sound as you can for that part. While that's a challenging aria that might be one for someone who has an easy top that they could start with.

*If you could identify the top three pedagogical issues you've observed in dramatic sopranos what would they be?*

I'm sort of repeating myself with having enough sound in the middle voice. The negotiation of getting into the chest voice so it sounds like one instrument is difficult. In an Italian opera you sometimes prize that difference in sound. When you sing Santuzza you're not really interested in a blended sound. It's so much more of a visceral type of thing. So, I would say the blending into the chest voice to be seamless and making enough sound in the middle and having the top voice that will withstand the endurance test. It is difficult to negotiate the *passaggio* and be able to come out with these high C's and high B naturals and high B flats without feeling like you're dying and then make a sound that also is beautiful rather than screaming. So those are the three.

*What advice would you give to up and coming dramatic sopranos regarding working towards a successful career?*

I think you have to be fluent in the languages that you sing, particularly German if you're going to sing the German repertoire. I think you want to make sure that your voice stays healthy. You want to look out for things like shredding, wobble coming in, and the vibrato getting slower. You want to make sure that singing repertoire that's too heavy doesn't lower your tessitura and that you don't lose things in the process of trying to sing that repertoire. You need to be very self-protective in that you have to listen to your coachings, listen to your lessons, and keep any eye on what your tessitura was before and

what it is now. Make sure that you stay healthy as you continue to work at that and that there's no vocal deterioration.

*Is there any other information you feel would be helpful to offer regarding this topic?*

I would say that musicianship has two qualities. First, you need a capable musician to learn roles like Elektra and Salome. In terms of being a musical person and in terms of how to express emotions on a purely musical level aside from the text is lacking in a lot of opera singers. They don't really know how to use color, they don't know how to use harmony, rhythm, phrasing, and structure to express a lot that can't be said in words. I think that the Wagnerian and the Mozart repertoire and the composers that wrote absolute music as well as programmatic music sometimes provide singers with a difficult challenge of being able to express themselves as musical beings.

## APPENDIX B – Performer’s Guide to the Music

This appendix presents an in-depth performer’s guide to the music for developing and aging dramatic sopranos. This gives the singer the opportunity to apply pedagogy to performance. These suggestions are compiled predominantly from interviews with professionals in the field as well as additional research into the writings of singers from past eras. The singer may use this information to determine what feels good in the voice with the help of a professional teacher and/or coach. If it doesn’t feel right, then it probably isn’t right. It is important to explore as many options as possible so opportunities for continued growth vocally and dramatically continue to be realized. Although this section covers opera, art song is also an invaluable resource in the developmental stages and could be considered as a preface to studying operatic repertoire.

Specifically, this appendix offers a brief glimpse at the composers, their operatic writings, the characters and their music, and gaining a basic knowledge of each opera. Each of these factors are imperative to a successful performance. The most popular composers for this voice type will be featured as well as some secondary composers whose works may not be as common. Specific operas will be featured with a brief synopsis highlighting the action, a basic character study, and a musical guide to aid the singer in presenting each role successfully. The list is not all-inclusive and only a smaller portion of operas from each composer will be presented. A more thorough printing of synopsis information can be found in *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* edited by Amanda Holden.<sup>202</sup>

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202. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

## George Frideric Handel (1685-1705)

George Frideric Handel is one of the most well-known Baroque composers of opera and oratorio. His career spanned compositional work in the countries of Germany, Italy, and England. He is best known for his oratorio, *The Messiah*, which is a work for orchestra, soloists, and choir that is often performed during the Christmas season. He also has a wealth of operas, numbering over forty, some of which are still in the operatic repertory today. Handel, master composer of many genres including opera, developed the Italian *opera seria* to an important peak during the Baroque time period.<sup>203</sup>

Handel's compositional style includes a gift for improvisation and quick writing.<sup>204</sup> He often borrowed musical ideas or complete sections from his previous works or from the music compositions of others.<sup>205</sup> He had an ability of combining new musical stylistic features without abandoning the older, time-honored traditions of the music of the time.<sup>206</sup> His operas, typical of the characteristics of *opera seria* with da capo arias, recitative, duets, and ensemble numbers, fell from the repertory between 1754 and 1920.<sup>207</sup> Therefore, a revival of his operatic works has taken place within the last seventy-five years. His operas often centered around Greek figures, possessing a tonal center for the entire piece while certain characters were associated with specific keys.<sup>208</sup>

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203. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 170.

204. Winton Dean, *The New Grove Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 79.

205. *Ibid.*, 80.

206. *Ibid.*, 81.

207. *Ibid.*, 102.

208. *Ibid.*, 103.

One of the fortunate details about Handel's operatic writing is that the roles can be sung by lighter voices as well as dramatic voices. Therefore, looking at Handel opera roles is a great place to start when a singer is young and searching for repertoire. The standard style of the times employed recitative to advance the action while the arias focused on one particular emotion or mood. The typical form of Baroque arias is an A section followed by a contrasting B section then a return to the A section with ornaments added. Possessing the skill of delivering smooth recitative as well as adding ornaments to the vocal line is imperative for every singer in their overall development.

There are two specific operas mentioned by Christine Goerke that bode well for the budding dramatic soprano, especially if the singer has access to coloratura.<sup>209</sup> They are the opera *Agrippina* with the title role and *Rinaldo* with the role of Armida. There are many additional Handel operas to explore but the singer can focus on these two as a launching point for early music research.

### *Agrippina*

*Agrippina* is a drama with music in three acts at approximately three hours in length. It was composed in 1709. The arias are shorter but greater in number compared to Handel's later operas.<sup>210</sup> Holden states, "*Agrippina* is arguably Handel's first operatic masterpiece. The plot is an anti-heroic satirical comedy. The characters (and their follies)

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209. Christine Goerke, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.

210. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 173.

are vividly portrayed with a light touch; yet the seriousness of the motivations and issues that produce the dramatic tensions are never undercut.”<sup>211</sup>

It is with *Agrippina* that Handel is considered to have reached his full operatic maturity as a composer.<sup>212</sup> The title role of Agrippina is a better fit for a voice that thrives in the middle register. The singer has eight arias to choose from in this opera. Agrippina’s opening aria, “L’alma mia frà le tempeste,” is a great choice for any intermediate singer. There are plenty of melismatic runs that make sense to the singer. The aria resides primarily in the middle voice and it has a nice allegro feel. In contrast, Agrippina’s second aria, “Tu ben degno,” has shorter melismatic passages that alternate between duple and triple rhythms. This aria highlights the advantages of having a developed chest voice. Overall, the phrases are shorter and the music itself has a sadder affect.

A great aria for a younger, developing singer would be “Ho un no so che nel cor.” The music is very light. There are no melismatic runs, so it is great for college-aged beginners. The accompaniment is not thick in texture, so the singer must be comfortable being vocally exposed. For the advanced singer, “Pensieri, voi mi tormentate” would be a nice choice. The phrases are longer and the orchestral accompaniment is quite dramatic. There are slight tonal shifts in the vocal line that add color to the music. The aria as a whole is more difficult and the B section provides a complete contrast to the opening A section. This aria is the longest of all of Agrippina’s music at over six minutes.

### *Rinaldo*

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211. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 173.

212. Winton Dean, *The New Grove Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 104.



Handel composed *Rinaldo* from 1710-11 and revised it in 1731. It is an opera in three acts at approximately three hours long. In a newspaper article on March 6, 1711, it was said that *Rinaldo* contained, “Thunder and Lightning, Illuminations, and Fireworks.”<sup>213</sup> The setting for Act I is outside the gates of Jerusalem at a Christian camp. If he conquers the city, Rinaldo wins the hand of Almirena. Armida, described as an Amazonian enchantress and the Queen of Damascus, comes on the scene warning that success depends on separating Rinaldo from the Christian army. Armida leads Almirena away, much to Rinaldo’s disappointment.

For the role of Armida, the singer must be able to move the voice quickly up and down the range. The recitative sections provide appropriate moments for the voice to show off some dramatic color. Armida has two arias in Act I that appropriately allow a younger singer to develop flair for the dramatic without demanding a large amount of technical prowess needed for later literature. The first aria, “Furie terribili,” is a flashy entrance for Armida’s character. Separated by a recitative, her second aria, “Molto voglio,” is easier to manage and would be a better place to begin for younger singers. Armida also has two arias toward the end of Act II, “Ah, crudel” and “Vo’ far guerra.” “Ah, crudel” is marked adagio and allows for legato line development in the A section with more melismatic movement juxtaposed in the presto B section. “Vo’ far guerra” is similar in style to Armida’s second aria and is a fitting ending aria for Armida’s character at the end of the opera.

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213. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 174.

In summary, *Armida* is a great role to study to work on recitative, coloratura, vocal movement, and beginning dramatic studies. A firm basis in solid technique is required in addition to an open mind regarding dramatic voices singing Baroque operatic literature. The style in this early operatic music will only build the singer's technique as the voice continues to grow.

Although *Rinaldo* and *Agrippina* are just two examples from Handel's vast repertoire, this provides a starting place for the singer's research. The best approach is to listen through the scores and have the student demonstrate some vocal passages to see how the voice feels. Once the identification of a few arias that fit the student's current level of development become clear, use them in the singer's repertoire. These types of arias are great in aiding the heavier voice to remain light and agile.

#### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is one of the most recognized and well-known composers who has ever lived. His contribution to the classical period in music history is unparalleled by any other composer. A child prodigy of the piano and violin, he mainly received his music education from his father, Leopold. His list of works span many genres including symphonies, operas, keyboard music, songs, church music, oratorios, cantatas, concertos, and chamber music.

Mozart's operatic style provides excellent musical training for any singer. Many singers feel that singing Mozart brings their voice into top shape and that this style is needed before graduating into heavier music. It is said that "Mozart managed throughout his career to manipulate the musical medium at such a high level of artistry that he made it the guiding dramaturgical element, taking at the same time full advantage of verbal and

acting resources.”<sup>214</sup> As a composer, Mozart drew from his ability of improvising new music in the moment,<sup>215</sup> often composing at the piano.<sup>216</sup> His overarching composition style found him sketching out ideas in a broader view that eventually became a first draft before evolving into a completed score.<sup>217</sup>

### *Idomeneo*

*Idomeneo* is a drama with music in three acts approximately three and a half hours long with a half hour ballet. Mozart composed it from 1780-81. *Idomeneo* is classified as a sacrifice opera, described by Melchior von Grimm as “a very interesting spectacle to behold and offered many situations at once strong and pathetic and suitable for music.”<sup>218</sup> The opera is not considered to be part of the regular opera repertoire. Although several factors contribute to its scarcity, one of the main reasons is due to the weak libretto. Liebner states that the libretto “was a mediocre work, following the style of Metastasio but lacking his feeling for the theatre, his poetic imagination, and his dramatic economy.”<sup>219</sup> Mozart made up for the libretto’s shortcomings by writing music that stimulated “justified and understandable amazement: the romantic, unrestrained passion of the musical material; the artistic portrayal of characters in the subtlest shades of

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214. Cliff Eisen and Simon P. Keefe, eds., *The Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 373-4.

215. *Ibid.*, 101.

216. *Ibid.*, 102.

217. *Ibid.*, 103.

218. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 265.

219. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 40.

changing moods; the brilliance of musical invention sharply contrasted with the classically-balanced opera seria style, and the richness of style...serving the artistic expression...”<sup>220</sup>

Elettra, the role most often sung by dramatic voices, is immediately caught in a conflict due to “unreturned passion and jealous intrigues.”<sup>221</sup> These emotions over-take her and cause her to display her rage and fury throughout the opera. Her music is some of the most dramatic of any Mozart female character which makes this role a great possibility for younger dramatic sopranos. As a character, “she was not born evil, nor is she wicked for wickedness’ sake; it is simply that love has driven her out of her mind and makes her want to destroy everything around her.”<sup>222</sup> Holden states, “Elettra has the most varied and difficult role in Mozart...she can sing of the joys of love...but her first and last arias express fury beyond the limits of sanity, especially in the manic laugh that concludes the latter.”<sup>223</sup>

Elettra’s first and last arias are described as “all-sweeping, demoniacal passion.”<sup>224</sup> “Tutte nel cor vi sento,” Elettra’s sweeping first aria, finds her actively seeking “revenge with passionate jealousy...” and appealing “to the furies of hell to help her in her revenge.”<sup>225</sup> Elettra’s middle aria, “Idol mio” shows a different side of her

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220. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 41.

221. *Ibid.*, 44.

222. *Ibid.*, 64.

223. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 265.

224. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 41.

225. *Ibid.*, 50.

character with a sweet aria about her hope of Idamante one day choosing to love her instead of Ilia. Elettra's last aria, "D'Oreste, d'Ajace," is sometimes cut from the end of the opera. It is entirely dramatic revealing Elettra's fury over not winning Idamante and wishing to die.

### *Le nozze di Figaro*

*Le nozze di Figaro* is an opera buffa in four acts approximately three hours in length and composed from 1785-86. When the opera first premiered there were mixed reviews. One negative review stated, "This piece, destitute of humour and barren of wit, owes its success to the immorality of its characters and the indecent incidents which support its flimsy meretricious fable, wherein youth is stripped of innocence and a husband is painted vicious, and a matron is cloathed [*sic*] with shame..."<sup>226</sup> The plot is not easily discernable as the opera is more of "a succession of awkward and humorous situations, calling forth an abundance of sparkling repartee."<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, *Le nozze di Figaro* is one of the most well-known operas worldwide, with frequent performances of this comic repertory staple.

The Countess's character "represents a femininity that is at once lofty and grounded, feisty and hesitant, sensual and demure. She also exhibits a capacity for audaciousness unimagined by her genteel, sentimental peers."<sup>228</sup> The Countess is often

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226. R.B Moberly, *Three Mozart Operas: Figaro, Don Giovanni, The Magic Flute* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1968), 37.

227. J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Favourite Operas: From Mozart to Mascagni* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1910), 9.

228. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 160.

cast with an older, mature soprano, distinguishing her from the younger Susanna.<sup>229</sup> She is a graceful “woman who will actively protect the interests of those she loves, even as she bears the pain of her husband’s indifference.”<sup>230</sup> When asked what role has changed her life so far, Rachel Willis-Sørensen named the Countess. She said,

“Yes, it is the Countess. All the roles you sing will have an effect on you if you're doing it right. You put yourself out there. You must understand why they do what they're doing. It should affect you emotionally. It should make you have a broader range of compassion for people of varying circumstances. I get to sing the Countess all the time. It was so hard and I wondered why anyone would want me to do it. I kept thinking that “Dove sono” is so hard! Why am I being paid to do this? They just don't know that it's terrible. That's what I thought. They just don't know. Somehow, I've pulled the wool over all these people's eyes.”<sup>231</sup>

“Porgi amor” and “Dove sono,” the Countess’s two arias where she reflects on her situation, “are steeped in love-anguish, but she has a playful side, too, and enough spirit to counter the injustices of her husband.”<sup>232</sup> “Porgi amor” is less difficult and shorter than “Dove sono.” Hunter describes the Countess’s opening aria in Act II as “a moment of self-absorbed, song-like beauty, used to introduce” the Countess and “is overwhelmingly a female moment.”<sup>233</sup> Due to its technical difficulty, “Dove sono” is appropriate for a *spinto* voice who can perform without vocal flaws in the legato line.<sup>234</sup> “Musically, it

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229. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 168.

230. *Ibid.*, 169.

231. Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Skype interview by author, New York City, July 21, 2016.

232. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 158.

233. *Ibid.*, 170.

234. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 159.

is...the heftier and more complete of the two” arias and should be used as a rubric for success to any singer studying the role.<sup>235</sup> In summary, the Countess’s “two revelatory arias and final act of forgiveness are frequently understood as forming a psychological arc from introspection to action, as she chooses to exert this special power.”<sup>236</sup>

### *Don Giovanni*

*Don Giovanni* is a drama giocoso in two acts approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes long and was composed in 1787. With *Don Giovanni* a new stage style, *dramma giocoso*, was born. *Dramma giocoso* is simply “a comedy with a serious message.”<sup>237</sup>

Referencing *Don Giovanni*, Gounod said that the score:

“...has exercised the influence of a revelation upon the whole of my life; it has been and remains for me a kind of incarnation of dramatic and musical infallibility. I regard it as a work without blemish, of uninterrupted perfection, and this commentary is but the humble testimony of my veneration and gratitude to the genius to whom I owe the purest and most permanent joys of my life as a musician.”<sup>238</sup>

Donna Anna and Donna Elvira are the two roles most often performed by *spintos* or more dramatic voices. The entire opera revolves around Donna Anna and her refusal to give into Don Giovanni’s advances which causes Giovanni to kill her father. Elvira, who has already been involved with and discarded by Giovanni, is a woman scorned and on the hunt for revenge. Of the two roles, Elvira lends itself to a more dramatic tone quality

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235. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 173.

236. *Ibid.*, 172.

237. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 138.

238. J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Favourite Operas: From Mozart to Mascagni* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1910), 7.

as opposed to Anna. In the end, the two women join forces to bring Don Giovanni to justice. Donna Anna's character is "intellectually and emotionally the superior" to her male counterpart, Don Ottavio.<sup>239</sup> Elvira's character is a "middle-class woman alone in the world, less restricted by the demands of society," and "has more freedom of emotion and action. In fact, Elvira, denied her own love, actively interferes with the lives of the other two women."<sup>240</sup>

The role of Donna Anna does not necessarily require a dramatic soprano but does demand power with ring in the voice.<sup>241</sup> In "Or sai chi l'onore," Einstein construes Anna's situation to show she "has undoubtedly fallen victim to our hero who, disguised as Don Ottavio in the darkness of the night, achieved the fulfilment of his desires; and the curtain goes up at the moment when Donna Anna becomes convinced of the horrible certainty of her mistake."<sup>242</sup> "Non mi dir" sets the stage for Donna Anna and Ottavio's happy ending, achieved only by Ottavio's patience for Anna to properly grieve her father's death. The end of the aria has several difficult melismatic passages in quick succession.

The role of Donna Elvira was originally cast with a dramatic soprano voice.<sup>243</sup> Elvira offers much dramatic music to sing and staging to perform. "Ah, chi mi dice mai,"

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239. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 188.

240. *Ibid.*, 190.

241. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 136.

242. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 157.

243. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 142.



Elvira's opening aria, is presented as a trio. Liebner said, "The tone of the aria presents a somewhat aged, dignified, slightly hysterical lady who, however, loves and hates with sincere passion."<sup>244</sup> "Ah, fuggi il traditor" finds Elvira intervening between Don Giovanni pledging his love to Zerlina. "This massive Handelian sound, recalling baroque oratorios and concerto grossos, was almost completely passé in Mozart's time, just as in the world of superficial sentiments and light flirtations Elvira's passionate love for the one man in her life was completely outdated."<sup>245</sup> "Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata" is Elvira's "last attempt by a human being to save Don Giovanni before the intervention and judgement of the superior power."<sup>246</sup>

### *Così fan tutte*

*Così fan tutte* is a *drama giocoso* in two acts approximately three hours in length and was composed in 1789. Although Mozart was quite proud of his opera, the last in his collaboration with librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, reviewers criticized the story calling the opera, "a miserable Italian product with the powerful, sublime music of Mozart" and left his supporters wondering "how the composer could 'waste his heavenly sweet melodies on such a miserable and clumsy text.'"<sup>247</sup> Currently, *Così fan tutte* is "acknowledged to be a masterpiece of comic invention, in which disturbing psychological issues are probed

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244. János Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 147.

245. *Ibid.*, 154.

246. *Ibid.*, 180.

247. Bruce Alan Brown, *W.A. Mozart: Così fan tutte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

at least as deeply as in the prior collaborations of its authors.”<sup>248</sup> The over-arching theme of the opera can be summarized as this: “Happy is he who looks on the bright side of things, and in all cases lets himself be guided by reason. May that which makes others weep be for him a cause to laugh, and amidst the storms of this world he will find perfect calm.”<sup>249</sup>

As a character, Fiordiligi “is concerned not just with feeling, but with *doing* the right thing. She is the deeper of the two women, serving as both a parallel and a contrast to her sister. Fiordiligi thinks of constancy as a moral obligation and takes her promise to Guglielmo seriously.”<sup>250</sup> Musically, the role of Fiordiligi is challenging and fun to sing. Ensemble singing is plentiful and her two arias, “Come scoglio” and “Per pieta” have beautiful melodies with many opportunities to show off technical skill and vocal finesse. There is a lot of recitative between musical numbers that are difficult to memorize and coordinate with other characters. Six principal singers are featured throughout with chorus that cause the role of Fiordiligi to feel a bit long and arduous. She is the highest voice in all ensemble singing, requiring a lightness in the voice. For all its difficulty, a singer is rewarded with some of Mozart’s best writing for extending vocal boundaries and growing vocally.

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248. Bruce Alan Brown, *W.A. Mozart: Così fan tutte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

249. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 214.

250. *Ibid.*, 241.

“Come scoglio” is “one of the most impressive arias in all of Mozart’s repertoire.”<sup>251</sup> It “teeters on the edge between seriousness and farce.”<sup>252</sup> “...Fiordiligi’s repudiation sounds a bit like a teenager’s rhapsodic conniption: short on experience in love, she lacks perspective and any sense of moderation.”<sup>253</sup> Miller suggests that the “arpeggiated figures requested of Fiordiligi in ‘Come scoglio’...provide the ample soprano voice with agility exercises that can serve well as part of the regular warm-up.”<sup>254</sup> The aria requires an extensive range accessing low A below middle C to a high C6. The large shifts through registers often occur during one phrase. The more difficult section in the aria is the melismatic triplets toward the end. This aria is not suggested for beginners and is the most dramatic music Fiordiligi sings. When beginning the learning process, take each section separately before stringing the whole aria together.<sup>255</sup> You can also successfully extract phrases and use them as vocal exercises.

### *Die Zauberflöte*

*Die Zauberflöte* is a German opera in two acts approximately two and a half hours in length and was composed in 1791. This opera is considered one of Mozart’s final great compositions, different from the previously discussed opera in that it is a *Singspiel*. In

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251. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 126.

252. Bruce Alan Brown, *W.A. Mozart: Così fan tutte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35.

253. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 240-1.

254. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

255. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 128.

addition to the libretto being written in German, musical numbers are separated by spoken dialogue. The story has been described as “jumpy” and “ill-assorted...in which the sequence of situations is not guided by an apparent logic...”<sup>256</sup> Although the story unfolds many fantastical happenings that lack realism, *Die Zauberflöte* is a great choice to introduce children and adults to opera. Chailley gives the following description:

“The first act begins as a fairy tale, continues as a *commedia buffa*, and ends in philosophic tirades. The second act is even less comprehensible: we watch the chief protagonists being subjected to unexplained trials of astonishing arbitrariness and then suddenly learn that they have earned the right to places of honor in the glory of Isis and Osiris.”<sup>257</sup>

Pamina is a role that could be studied by younger dramatic voices. It is not usually cast with a larger voice but with a full lyric voice. The role of the First or Second Lady are more suitable to a developing dramatic voice. Having sung the role of the Second Lady myself, it is a sufficient character to learn dramatic acting skills, ensemble singing, and absorbing information related to performing in an opera, especially if you have not sung a role before. The Three Ladies sing together in three-part harmony most of the time with occasional solo lines inserted. Therefore, the music is easier to learn and added pressures of arias are not present. All Three Ladies, in “their supportive role...exhibit neither Pamina’s high-minded dignity, nor the Queen’s majestic audacity, but the Three Ladies illuminate best the ‘normal’ parameters of female participation in the community

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256. Jacques Chailley, *The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera: An Interpretation of the Libretto and the Music*, trans. Herbert Weinstock. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 3.

<sup>257</sup>. Ibid.

of the Initiated and may well tell us something about Mozart's...outlook on women and Masonry."<sup>258</sup>

### Ludwig van Beethoven 1770-1827

Ludwig van Beethoven is one of the most well-known composers of a vast array of music compositions bridging the classical period into the early romantic period. His musical achievements have guaranteed his rightful place in history as one of the greatest composers who ever lived. He earned great success even though he developed deafness later in life. "More than any other composer he deserves to be called the Shakespeare of music, for he reaches to the heights and plumbs the depths of the human spirit as no other composer has done."<sup>259</sup> His work is considered a continuation of Mozart and Haydn, both of whom he studied with, and laying the groundwork for Wagner.<sup>260</sup> His large body of works consists of nine symphonies, thirty-two piano sonatas, seventeen string quartets, and one opera.<sup>261</sup>

### *Fidelio*

Beethoven's compositions have been classified to three specific periods in his life. *Fidelio* falls within his middle period from 1803 to 1808.<sup>262</sup> Beethoven's composition of

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258. Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 136-7.

259. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 92.

260. Ibid.

261. Ibid., 93.

262. Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson, *The New Grover Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983), 91.

*Fidelio* went through three different versions and were originally called *Leonore*.<sup>263</sup> *Fidelio*, an opera about married love, is presented in two acts, nineteen scenes, and is approximately two hours and fifteen minutes long. It was composed from 1804-1805 with the first revision in 1806 and the second revision in 1814.<sup>264</sup> In reference to the opera it is said, “From the somewhat servile echoes of French and German light opera in the opening numbers, he moved on to find an increasingly individual and elevated voice.”<sup>265</sup> Referencing *Fidelio*’s first performance in 1805, the singers “complained that portions of the work were unsingable, but Beethoven, with his usual obstinacy, declined to make any concessions.”<sup>266</sup> The music, reminiscent of the classical style with a developing dramatic flavor, is beautiful to listen to and to sing. The opera has its vocal challenges but can be very rewarding to perform.

“*Fidelio* in its final form is as characteristic and as powerfully wrought as anything Beethoven wrote. It took him longer to perfect, not only because to begin with he lacked experience of the operatic medium but also because the subject—the unjustly imprisoned man, the fearless, dedicated woman—moved him too much and struck such resounding chords in the depth of his being.”<sup>267</sup>

“Abscheulicher...wo eilst du hin?” is Leonora’s one dramatic aria in the opera.

Leonora’s husband, Florestan, is wrongly imprisoned. She has just overheard a plan to kill a prisoner that she believes to be her husband. She declares her love for Florestan,

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263. Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson, *The New Grover Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983), 116.

264. *Ibid.*, 15.

265. *Ibid.*

266. J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Favourite Operas: From Mozart to Mascagni* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1910), 24.

267. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 14-5.

knowing that her dedication will overcome evil and her husband will be saved. Leonora exudes her character traits in this aria, expressing horror, tranquility, and her more than noble intentions.<sup>268</sup> Singher says, “To be able to give a great rendition of this aria is one of the highest goals for a dramatic soprano.”<sup>269</sup> In addition to the aria, the quartet in Act II is dramatically and musically difficult.<sup>270</sup> The voice must be able to negotiate range and movement.

### Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Giuseppe Verdi is one of the most famous Italian operatic composers of the nineteenth century. Verdi studied music privately in Milan where he was denied a music scholarship due to his lack of talent.<sup>271</sup> Nevertheless, Verdi developed into one of the finest opera composers, having written many operas that are still performed regularly today. “Like Mozart Verdi was born into a tradition; unlike Mozart he survived it. While it was still vigorous he used the common language of his time and place inflecting it to suit his own artistic personality; but as the personality grew so the inflection changed.”<sup>272</sup>

“In Verdi the nineteenth-century Italian school of opera composition reaches its very height. He took its gift for melody and its knack of the full use of vocal capabilities, and to them, in increasing measure as his genius matured, he added a

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268. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 1-2.

269. *Ibid.*, 3.

270. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 92.

271. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1078.

272. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 37.

richer harmony and orchestration and a greater sense of poetry, dramatic fitness, dignity, and truth.”<sup>273</sup>

In Verdi’s earlier operas such as *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata*, his melodies along with the melodrama were particularly beautiful and developed.<sup>274</sup> Over time, Verdi’s operas began to develop with “the gradual elimination of virtuoso singing – vocalizes, trills, fioritura, embellishments.”<sup>275</sup> The drama in his later operas center around love featured by a soprano and tenor who portray young lovers with lighter, more ringing voices.<sup>276</sup> The soprano characters from his earlier operatic writing period are considered to be more dramatic coloraturas.<sup>277</sup> The earlier Verdi soprano contrasts “the mature Verdi’s dramatic soprano, whose voice, owing to the particular nature of the musical writing, is darker, more incisive, and greater in volume than the dramatic-coloratura.”<sup>278</sup> Ashbrook states that “Verdi’s concept of the voice...developed out of the older *bel canto* tradition, with its emphasis on agility, the long line, and elegance of style.”<sup>279</sup>

### *Il Trovatore*

*Il Trovatore* is a drama in four parts approximately two hours and fifteen minutes in length. It was composed from 1851-53 and was revised for Paris in 1856. Budden

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273. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1079.

274. *Ibid.*, 1078.

275. William Weaver and Martin Chusid, eds. *The Verdi Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 232.

276. *Ibid.*, 217.

277. *Ibid.*, 221.

278. *Ibid.*, 223.

279. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 80-1.



states that *Il Trovatore* is “the most conservative of all in form and musical language...” compared to Verdi’s other early operas.<sup>280</sup> It is with this opera that Verdi reached “immediately to the hearts of his audience” like no other opera he had written previously.<sup>281</sup> The libretto has been called “sadly confused, and much of it borders on the incomprehensible.”<sup>282</sup> Nevertheless, we find Verdi “at the height of his melodic vitality; fire his imagination through an extravagant and bizarre plot; then channel it through the most conventional of libretto structures – such is the recipe for one of the strangest and most powerful phenomena in the world of Italian opera.”<sup>283</sup> *Il Trovatore* is a “tale about a mother’s love both for her own mother and for her son. The work proceeds through a series of encounters in which this love is examined from many different angles, not least of these begin the potential for transcendence inherent in any love relation which is built neither on interpersonal communication, nor on erotic infatuation.”<sup>284</sup>

“Caruso once famously, if discouragingly, remarked that all one needed for a good performance were the four greatest singers in the world.”<sup>285</sup> The role of Leonora “...makes the most extreme demands on the voice, in range, in emotions, in colors, in

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280. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 35.

281. *Ibid.*, 66.

282. J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Favourite Operas: From Mozart to Mascagni* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1910), 79.

283. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 67.

284. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 438.

285. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 497.

style.”<sup>286</sup> Budden states that “Leonora’s music is purely lyrical...Leonora’s music moves in long phrases mostly characterized by a soaring, ‘aspiring’ quality; her melodies are minted from the purest gold of the Italian lyrical tradition...”<sup>287</sup> Every choice she makes is driven by her love for Manrico.

When asked what operatic role changed her life and why, Marjorie Owens, a current International opera singer in the dramatic soprano *Fach*, answered that it was Leonora. She said:

“It was rough in the beginning and I thought I was never going to be able to sing it. I kept asking myself why was I covering this? It was so hard. But eventually I figured it out. It took a lot of singing through it. I started figuring out exactly what I was doing wrong. I figured out how to approach the top in the aria. You have to make a choice. And I've sung it several times now and each time it's always felt different but better. And it's enabled me to play with my top a lot more than I used to be able to.”<sup>288</sup>

Leonora’s first aria, “Tacea la notte,” is written for a lyric *spinto* with dramatic capabilities.<sup>289</sup> Although the aria is beautiful, it is not easy to sing especially since there is a high D6 that the soprano must enter on in the cadenza at the end. Regarding the aria, Budden states, “For concentration of lyrical poetry ‘Tacea la notte’ is unsurpassed in all Verdi’s music, while as a tour de force of melodic craftsmanship it is without parallel anywhere...It is as though throughout 28 slow bars the melodic centre of gravity

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286. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 306.

287. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 70.

288. Marjorie Owens, Skype interview by author, July 7, 2016.

289. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 306.

continually rises to culminate in that final soaring flight up to B flat...”<sup>290</sup> Regarding the cabaletta, Miller says, “The soprano with a voice of ample dimensions should memorize this excerpt for use as a formula for breath-management calisthenics; it provides a valuable vocalization vehicle for the large, mature lyric or *spinto* voice that already possesses a high level of skill.”<sup>291</sup> It is a stunningly impressive aria for Leonora to make her first entrance.

“Di tale amor” directly follows “Tacea la notte” and inspires a completely different affectation. It requires vocal gymnastics such as trills, staccato, large leaps, and melismatic runs spanning over two octaves. Leonora has immediately fallen in love with a mysterious knight who serenades her below her bedroom window and she expresses her feelings of love through this aria. Budden points out that the “Verdian devices are here purged of all vulgarity. If the manner is old-fashioned the matter is fresh, vital and a suitable complement to what has gone before with Leonora’s aspiring lyricism reflected in joyous leaps and trills.”<sup>292</sup>

“D’amor sull’ali rosee,” Leonora’s first Act IV aria, is even more splendidly beautiful and difficult than her first aria. It requires a large, tender, flexible, and refined voice.<sup>293</sup> Leonora has disguised herself to gain entrance into the prison, hoping that her

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290. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 75.

291. Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53.

292. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 78.

293. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 315.

love will sustain Manrico. “Leonora imagines she sees death ‘hovering as on sable wings’ above the tower in which Manrico is incarcerated. She swears that she will prove there is no stronger love on Earth than hers for Manrico. Either she will save his life by sacrificing hers or they will be united in eternity.”<sup>294</sup> This cantabile

“is one of those purely Italian melodies which begin in the minor key and end in the relative major without any sense of incompleteness...the harmonic and the orchestral palette are unusually delicate, with only one horn in the wind group and all doubling instruments except first violins removed from the summit of a phrase so that the voice can emerge in all its beauty.”<sup>295</sup>

Leonora’s final aria, “Tu vedrai che amor in terra” is the most straightforward of the four arias. It is not without dramatic and vocal difficulties but seems to be easier than the other three. Leonora has reached her emotional climax over worrying about the fate of the man she loves. Budden says, “It is a noble piece of music, brilliant and moving with the minor-key ritornello conveying the right suggestion of underlying tragedy. Yet its range is cruelly taxing and its position between two scenes dominated mainly by the soprano causes many Leonoras to omit it.”<sup>296</sup> By itself, the aria is often featured in concerts due to its popularity.<sup>297</sup>

### *Un Ballo in Maschera*

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294. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 276.

295. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 99.

296. *Ibid.*, 102.

297. *Ibid.*

*Un Ballo in Maschera* is a melodrama in three acts approximately two hours and fifteen minutes in length and was composed from 1857-58. *Un Ballo in Maschera* contains

“a cleverly constructed plot in which irony follows irony. It abounds in striking situations...it offers opportunities for a display of the most intense and varied emotions; and it is full of suspense; in short an ideal work for a theatre that put more value on sensation than on truthful portrayal of character.”<sup>298</sup>

After obtaining guidelines from the censorship Verdi was despondent to find out that the libretto would need to be redone to account for Felice Orsini’s endeavor to assassinate Napoleon III.<sup>299</sup> Therefore, Verdi and his librettist, Somma, moved the action of the opera to colonial America.<sup>300</sup> Compared to his other operas, *Un Ballo in Maschera* “has most consistently held the stage even when the reaction against Verdi was at its height.”<sup>301</sup> In Lewsey’s opinion,

“*Un Ballo in Maschera* is one of Verdi’s most rewarding operas because it succeeds by unfolding, without hysteria, but with steady inevitability, a dilemma which is at the centre of all Verdi’s work: the conflict that arises between the needs of the individual and the inexorable requirements of the society in which that individual has his being.”<sup>302</sup>

Verdi’s choice for the role of Amelia was Rosina Penco, a lyric *spinto* and the same singer who debuted Leonora in *Il Trovatore*.<sup>303</sup> The role of Amelia contains an

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298. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 364.

299. *Ibid.*, 369.

300. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 55.

301. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 374.

302. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 62.

303. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 375.

“abundance of middle and lower notes, the prevalence of the minor mode combined with the complete absence of fioritura,” therefore making the role “the property of the heavy dramatic soprano.”<sup>304</sup> “Amelia is first and foremost wife and mother, and only thereafter lover. This is her tragedy, that she cannot accept the transition from the role of lover to that of wife and mother.”<sup>305</sup> Through all of the twists and turns, she cares most about her son and staying true to her marriage vows.

In Amelia’s first aria, “Ma dall’arido stelo divulsa,” Amelia finds herself in a tragic situation “for her love for Riccardo and her very existence have become synonymous. If she loses one she will lose the other. She does not want to die, but she does not wish to go on living a lie. Her life with Renato is a lie. Her life with Riccardo is barely a possibility.”<sup>306</sup> Throughout this aria, Amelia completes the task Ulrica, a local fortune-teller, has given her to subside her feelings for Riccardo that morphs into visions of other-worldly spirits lurking at the gallows, filling her with terror. The only thing that saves her is her ardent prayer. “This aria is a perfect example of Verdi the dramatist and must be sung and acted, even with the voice, for all it is worth. It requires a ringing spinto voice and an interpreter of great intensity and versatility.”<sup>307</sup>

“Morrò, ma prima in grazia,” Amelia’s second aria, provides an extreme contrast to her first. Singher expresses his opinion that it must be sung beautifully, with much

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304. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 375.

305. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 26.

306. *Ibid.*, 27.

307. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 252.

emotion, keeping the voice narrow in the upper register.<sup>308</sup> The aria is dominated by Amelia's plea to Renato to allow her to see her son one more time before he kills her. "Amelia's aria in Act II was written three times before it had the warmth and the 'disordine' that Verdi wanted."<sup>309</sup> This aria reflects her plea to Renato "to think not just of the present of his own wounded pride, but of the future that they have made between them – before their lives and their marriage became an impossibility."<sup>310</sup>

### *Don Carlos*

*Don Carlos* is a grand opera in five acts approximately three hours and thirty minutes in length and was composed from 1866-67 with a revision in 1872 and a four-act version from 1882-83. *Don Carlos*, a vast work based on a play by Schiller, was originally commissioned for the Paris Opera.<sup>311</sup> In addition to the French version there is also an Italian version. *Don Carlos* went through many revisions, five of which are recognized by Budden in his musical analysis of the opera.<sup>312</sup> In Budden's opinion, "no other opera of Verdi's contains such a wealth of alternative and superseded material, so little of which can be dismissed out of hand."<sup>313</sup> Lewsey states that, "Verdi's music raised what could have been simply a propagandist exercise into a great work of art with a

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308. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 254-6.

309. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 367.

310. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 27.

311. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 9.

312. *Ibid.*, 38-9.

313. *Ibid.*, 38.

humanitarian message that far transcends the political message, vital though it be. Human beings, like it or not, live out their lives and loves always within a political context.”<sup>314</sup> According to Budden, of “all Verdi’s operas *Don Carlos* remains the most ambitious; not, however, the most successful.”<sup>315</sup>

In Schiller’s play, Eboli is a multi-dimensional character who is “proud, wilful, [*sic*] passionate,” and “capable of great charm in the pursuit of her own ends.”<sup>316</sup> “Eboli is a lady of superior vitality who needs to be at the centre of attention. She hates nothing so much as being excluded.”<sup>317</sup> Although she is a mistress to the King, she has reached the peak of her social status wherein she develops “a sense of frustration which festers.”<sup>318</sup> Since the role of Eboli sits high for most mezzos, it is a great alternative for a dramatic soprano who feels that Elisabeth is a little too light for the voice.

“*Nei giardin del bello*,” Eboli’s opening aria, tells the story of a King who has become intrigued with a veiled woman. At the end of the song, he lifts the veil to find that it is his wife. The aria allows the singer to display excellent story-telling skills while displaying remarkable movement in the voice in the melody and final cadenza. Budden likens it to the “same kind of stylized exoticism as *Carmen*’s *Sequidilla*.”<sup>319</sup> “*O don*

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314. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 105.

315. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 153.

316. *Ibid.*, 13.

317. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 160.

318. *Ibid.*

319. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 68.



fatal,” Eboli’s most well-known aria, “curses the beauty which has led her to grow vain and haughty; and that has led her so far from her true objective in life.”<sup>320</sup> The aria “underwent three transformations before reaching its final form, as though the composer were torn between the desire to parade the full extension of the singer’s voice and a determination to keep the drama moving.”<sup>321</sup> The aria, spanning over two octaves, places high demands on dramatic mezzos. Singher insists that “...the quality of the voice must be maintained, a good quality free of artificial distortions and uncontrolled disorder.”<sup>322</sup> French repertoire is not as abundant for the dramatic soprano, so the French version of this aria would be acceptable in an aria package.

In Schiller’s play, Elisabeth “is little more than a plaster saint; the traditional image of wifely and womanly virtue, who springs to life only when defending herself against King Philip’s false accusations.”<sup>323</sup> “For most of the opera – all of it if the revised edition is employed – Elisabeth de Valois is in exile. This is the central and most important facet of her character; she is a displaced person.”<sup>324</sup> “Elisabeth represents all that Eboli can never be. Where Eboli is self-obsessed Elisabeth is selfless. Where Eboli lusts Elisabeth loves. Where Eboli is ambitious Elisabeth is disinterested.”<sup>325</sup>

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320. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 162.

321. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 22.

322. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 263.

323. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 13.

324. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 167.

325. *Ibid.*, 161.

“Di quale amor, di quanto ardor,” Elisabeth’s first aria, allows her to express her supreme happiness to marry Carlos and that he loves her in return. In structure, the aria serves as a cabaletta to the duet with Carlos. Thematic material related to Elisabeth’s homeland of Fontainebleau is also presented and revisited throughout the opera.<sup>326</sup> In “Non pianger, mia compagna,” Elisabeth bids farewell to her attendant who is being sent back to France after leaving the Queen unattended. Elisabeth gives her a ring as a gift and asks her to give greetings to the homeland she misses. The aria is structured as two verses allowing Elisabeth “to give full rein to those feelings of compassion which she has forcibly held in check during the preceding duet.”<sup>327</sup> “Tu che le vanità” finds Elisabeth begging for the strength to say goodbye to Carlos. She also reminisces of her homeland where she first met Carlos and fell in love. Several musical ideas are presented throughout this lengthy aria and they all “span a wide vocal range.”<sup>328</sup> Of Elisabeth’s three arias, “Tu che le vanità” is the most popular to sing in auditions and competitions.

### *Aida*

*Aida* is an opera in four acts approximately two hours and fifteen minutes in length and composed from 1870-71. The opera is set in Egypt, more specifically in Memphis at the time of the pharaohs. *Aida* is part of Verdi’s middle period of composition. “It is spectacular and dramatic, and is musically more developed and more

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<sup>326</sup>. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 50.

<sup>327</sup>. *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>328</sup>. *Ibid.*, 146.

dignified than its predecessors; its orchestration is at once richer and more refined.”<sup>329</sup>

The “main substance of the story concerns the intimate personal relationships of the three main protagonists.”<sup>330</sup> Amneris, the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh is in love with Radames, an Egyptian military general. Aida, slave to Amneris and the unknown daughter of the Ethiopian King, secures Radames’ affections which causes Amneris a great amount of jealousy and turmoil. In the end, Aida and Radames’ love is made perfect through their death. “In ‘Aida’ we find a true wedding of text and music – sustained dramatic power, noble orchestration.”<sup>331</sup> The musical structure is “surprisingly symmetrical” with a “richness of harmony and the swiftness and variety of harmonic movement.”<sup>332</sup> In its conclusion, “*Aida* would seem to suggest that the only true consummation of love lies in death. It is the supreme illogicality, yet irrefutable.”<sup>333</sup>

Aida and Radames’ love has been compared to Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, and Paris and Helen, wherein their death is “emblematic of that element of irrationality in human nature which will always transcend all petty divisiveness.”<sup>334</sup> Although Aida is a slave to Amneris, she is herself a princess. Aida’s “nature has been refined by adversity and suffering. Her enslavement and the helplessness of her

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329. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1078.

330. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 9.

331. J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Favourite Operas: From Mozart to Mascagni* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1910), 89.

332. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 198.

333. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 12.

334. *Ibid.*, 10.

predicament means that she cannot give vent to her natural hauteur. She must learn humility in order to survive.”<sup>335</sup> Aida as a role allows for a softer nuance and is more lyrical to sing.<sup>336</sup>

“Ritorna vincitor!” Aida’s opening aria, “requires not only a large spinto voice equally at ease in high and low ranges, very flexible and skilled in the use of colors, but also an interpreter capable of extreme intensity and of sincerity in violent contrasts.”<sup>337</sup> Aida has just witnessed the man she loves, Radames, lead a group of warriors to battle her homeland, Ethiopia. This causes Aida to reminisce about her country while feeling torn between her family and the man she loves. Budden states that the “conflict of love and patriotism...is common enough, but Verdi’s treatment of it is entirely new, especially in the context of an exit aria. He conducts the inner dialogue in the manner of a duet, as a sequence of short contrasting movements, each of which becomes more ‘formed’ than its predecessor.”<sup>338</sup> This aria holds a dramatic and strategic place in the opera and is difficult due to its differing sections. Over the course of the aria, all registers of the voice are explored.

“O patria mia,” Aida’s second aria, is quite different from the first. It is the evening before Amneris will marry Radames and Aida has come to the river in secret to

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335. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who in Verdi* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 10.

336. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 70.

337. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 247.

338. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 208.

meet with Radames. While she waits she sings this aria, holding memories of her homeland close to her heart. For this aria, "...the voice must be constantly connected with a distant, consistent, but flexible support."<sup>339</sup> This aria has a difficult high C preceded by ascending and descending melodic lines that requires a "light texture and a flowing tempo" to be successful.<sup>340</sup> The upper register must be navigated with precision and finesse. Possessing the ability to sing high pitches with a softer, floaty voice that still spins is imperative.

#### Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Richard Wagner is the pinnacle composer of the dramatic soprano *Fach*. Within his operas, we find a wealth of beautiful and challenging music to sing. As a man, he is considered a genius among composers, transforming the German Romantic style that eventually opened the door to modern music. Although he is highly regarded as one of the most ingenious and progressive operatic composers of all time, during his life Wagner seemed to be constantly in debt and was exiled to Switzerland twice due to his political involvements.<sup>341</sup> After he had already spent years writing his operas, he developed a relationship with King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who funded many of Wagner's ideas including the building of his very own opera house in Bayreuth.<sup>342</sup> Wagner is considered

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339. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 250-1.

340. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 205.

341. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1106.

342. *Ibid.*

to be a hands-on composer, writing his own libretti before setting it to music.<sup>343</sup> He is best known for his creation of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is translated as a total work of art. He combined the music of the orchestra and singers with the staging, scenery, lighting, costumes, and dancing to promote the ultimate operatic experience. As one of the world's best-known composers, it is said, "In him the German Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century found its completest musical stage expression. His genius adopted the harmonic intensities and emotional forcefulness of Beethoven, and, making them yet more intense and forceful, applied them to German myth and legend."<sup>344</sup>

When it comes to Wagner's style, there are many areas that can be discussed due to his evolution of Romantic acceptances that began to change into modern approaches. He abandoned the recitative and aria style of composition for the use of leading motivic development that connects each musical section.<sup>345</sup> These motives are specific to characters, emotions, and objects and provide an aural reminiscence and connection to the drama for the audience.<sup>346</sup> He also developed the idea of endless melody. "What Wagner wanted was both unbroken musical continuity and significance in every detail."<sup>347</sup> By definition, "A melody is infinite when every note 'says' something, and it 'says' something when every moment of the music has dramatic relevance as well as

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343. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1105.

344. Ibid.

345. Ibid.

346. Ibid.

347. John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 115.

being inwardly linked to other moments.”<sup>348</sup> Harmonically, Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde* is considered to be the first piece of modern music.<sup>349</sup> Wagner said, “Anyone who separates the harmony from the instrumentation when talking about my music is doing me as great an injustice as someone who separates my music from my text, my song from the words!”<sup>350</sup>

Wagner said, “In my operas every role is a major role.”<sup>351</sup> “The dramatic soprano roles, ranging over two and a half octaves, impose a great strain on the voice, and Wagner’s requirement that all the registers should be available for use at full volume demands a comprehensive knowledge of technique.”<sup>352</sup> Lilli Lehmann said,

“If we transfer the so-called Italian style to German feeling and seriousness without taking away the warmth of expression; if we cleanse it of exaggerations, which, by the way, the noble Italian singer is less guilty of than the German, we are well justified in interpreting Mozart, Beethoven, and others in the good Italian style. In this way I took great pleasure in singing Wagner’s music, for example, ‘Tristan und Isolde’ in a beautiful legato in the fine Italian style; for after all there is only one perfect art of song.”<sup>353</sup>

“Ever since Wagner made his influence felt, most singers strive to exaggerate the distinctness of the consonant, and often with them to expel the entire word in a harsh,

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348. John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 115.

349. *Ibid.*, 118.

350. *Ibid.*, 122-3.

351. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 233.

352. Frida Leider, *Playing My Part*, trans. Charles Osborne (London: Alma Classics Ltd., 1966), 73.

353. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 141.

shrill, toneless, ugly fashion; you can actually hear the end-consonants flying about in space.”<sup>354</sup>

### *Der fliegende Holländer*

*Der fliegende Holländer* is a romantic opera in three acts approximately two hours and fifteen minutes in length with composition beginning in 1840 and ending in 1841 with revisions in 1842, 1846, 1852, and 1860. “It was by no means uncommon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the Sturm und Drang and Romantic eras, to ennoble old tales, which had sunk to the level of broadsheet ballads, by writing new, poetic versions of them.”<sup>355</sup> Therefore, the old tale of a Dutchman forced to sail endlessly until Judgement Day was taken up as the subject matter for this early opera of Wagner. It “was the motive of the Dutchman being redeemed by a woman’s fidelity” that influenced Wagner’s decision to set this story to music.<sup>356</sup> Musically, *Der fliegende Holländer* “may seem a rather conventional work, revealing more in common with earlier German operas than with the masterpieces of Wagner’s maturity... It is, in fact, the first opera in which Wagner made significant use of the device of the leitmotiv or leading motif...”<sup>357</sup> “Wagner’s chief objective was to give expression to the theme of redemption of a man’s egoism through the love of a woman.”<sup>358</sup>

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354. Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing*, trans. Richard Aldrich, rev. ed. trans. Clara Willenbücher (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 120.

355. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 9.

356. Ibid.

357. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 74.

358. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 103.



Wagner specifically addressed the role of Senta as “hard to misread. One warning alone have I to give: let not the dreamy side of her nature be conceived in the sense of a modern, sickly sentimentality. Senta, on the contrary, is an altogether robust Northern maid, and even in her apparent sentimentality she is thoroughly naïve.”<sup>359</sup> Senta “has all the qualities of a true visionary; total introspection and a fierce imagination...Not surprisingly she is considered by her companions to be a little deranged.”<sup>360</sup> Senta as a character “is the purest statement of Wagner’s ideal of a woman who would selflessly devote herself to her man’s redemption.”<sup>361</sup> Varnay notes that the role of Senta is difficult to memorize due to many repetitions in the score.<sup>362</sup> Nilsson states that Senta has a lot of vocal challenges including huge dynamic shifts with wide leaps that extend over all the registers while managing both ends of the voice.<sup>363</sup>

Senta’s opening ballad, “Traft ihr das Schiff” tells the story of the Dutchman who has roamed the sea for many years looking for a faithful wife. Each seventh year the Dutchman is allowed to come ashore looking for a wife. Senta desires to be the woman who sets him free from his wandering. Dahlhaus asserts that the ballad is “the kernel of the whole work” and “is not simply the story of the Flying Dutchman but a conjuration

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359. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 73.

360. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 204.

361. *Ibid.*, 206.

362. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 79.

363. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 59.

that brings him to the spot...”<sup>364</sup> The ballad is set in a strophic format with three contrasting sections in each verse. Dramatic declarations at all dynamic levels as well as soft, floaty, legato singing is required for each stanza. Singher suggests the role is appropriate for a *Lirico-spinto* voice who is younger and has easy high notes.<sup>365</sup> It is important to note that the role of Senta is one of the most varied and difficult in the Wagnerian soprano repertoire, so it requires a voice with great technical mastery along with dramatic qualities and subtle nuances.

“Wie aus der Ferne längst vergang’ ner Zeiten” is Senta’s duet with the Dutchman towards the end of Act II. This duet is considered “the central point of the work” that “does not really break the silence in which the pair confront each other, but makes that silence resound...”<sup>366</sup> “This deeply felt outpouring of emotion is one of Wagner’s finest creations, despite its resorting at one point to a conventional Italianate cadenza.”<sup>367</sup> Vocally, the tessitura of the duet sits predominantly in the soprano’s *passaggio*. Birgit Nilsson said, “If one does not sing lightly and with support, by the end of the duet, the tongue and larynx have exchanged places. And just in this moment one soars up to not one but *two* long-sustained and brilliant high Bs!”<sup>368</sup> If a dramatic soprano is planning on

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364. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 15.

365. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 322.

366. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 11.

367. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 80.

368. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 59-60.

preparing the Ballad it is wise to sing through the duet to make sure the role is a possibility. The duet provides challenges that are not apparent in the Ballad.

### *Tannhäuser*

*Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* is a grand romantic opera in three acts composed from 1842-45 with many revisions through 1861. The opera is set at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Thuringia and Wartburg. Tannhäuser and Elisabeth's relationship was Wagner's own origination interwoven into a tale contrived from two separate literary stories.<sup>369</sup> "On one level a tale of sacred and profane love, Wagner's *Tannhäuser* is also a tragic love story and even a dissertation on the decline of the romantic ideal – and a cry of despair at the standards and tastes of the composer's materialistic nineteenth century."<sup>370</sup> "Wagner's musical language in this work is at a stage of its development where the systematic use of leitmotivic technique is not yet possible."<sup>371</sup> "There are anticipations in *Tannhäuser* of the compositional elements which, ten years later, formed the associations in the fully developed leitmotivic technique of the *Ring*..."<sup>372</sup> Although *Tannhäuser* is beloved by many, a few weeks before Wagner died, he told his wife, Cosima, that "he still owed the world *Tannhäuser*."<sup>373</sup>

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369. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 21.

370. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 101-02.

371. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 31.

372. *Ibid.*, 32.

373. *Ibid.*, 27.

“In some productions of *Tannhäuser* the same singer is cast to sing the roles of both Elisabeth and Venus. This makes eminent sense, since they are in reality two aspects of the same principle.”<sup>374</sup> “Venus is the goddess of love and sensuality. She is also associated with aesthetic beauty, poetry and art.”<sup>375</sup> Venus is a highly sensual character, dwelling in a world where satiating sexual desires is the utmost goal. She has seduced Tannhäuser to this world and makes it a personal mission to keep him for herself. Singing Venus requires an extreme amount of confidence. Regarding the singer who was to sing Venus at the premiere, Wagner said, “The only thing that might have helped towards a satisfactory impersonation of Venus would have been the singer’s confidence in her own great physical attraction, and in the effect it would help to produce by appealing to the public on that level.”<sup>376</sup>

In Venus’ Act I aria, “Geliebter, komm!,” Tannhäuser has expressed his desire to leave Venus provoking her to beg him to stay. Venus “cannot comprehend the human need for conflict and variety, for suffering even. When Tannhäuser pleads to be released she is at a loss to know what it is that distresses him, and outraged that her charms have failed to bind him to her.”<sup>377</sup> The aria is divided into two parts with the beginning

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374. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 255.

375. *Ibid.*, 254.

376. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 87.

377. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 255.

displaying a slower tempo with ethereal, clear tones while the end accelerates into long dramatic declamations.

Elisabeth is a saintly character, providing a complete contrast to Venus. Her love for Tannhäuser is so strong that she waits for his return, keeping herself from all other men. Even after Tannhäuser's betrayal and desire to return to the pleasures of Venus, Elisabeth prays for his redemption and is willing to sacrifice herself for this love.

“Elisabeth is saved from being merely a papier mâché Saint by the paradox at the heart of her character. On the one hand she is the only one at the Landgrave's court who can discern Tannhäuser's inherent genius and respond to the eroticism which defines it. On the other hand she transcends the moralistic high-mindedness of the Minstrel Knights with the sheer intensity of her spiritual passion.”<sup>378</sup>

One of the most difficult but popular of Wagner's arias is “Dich theure Halle,” Elisabeth's entrance aria in Act II. Elisabeth appears after having heard of Tannhäuser's return and sings a welcoming to the hall where they first met. “Elisabeth's aria is a magnificently spontaneous outburst of delight and eager anticipation...”<sup>379</sup> The voice needs brilliance and power that crescendos throughout the aria.<sup>380</sup> “The aria calls for a large soprano voice, because even though much of the music is above the staff, and there are unaccompanied phrases, other sections in the aria have heavy instrumental accompaniment.” “All extended notes above the staff must be sung with strength and

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378. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 44.

379. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 96.

380. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 333.

sufficient power to crescendo in the vocal line.”<sup>381</sup> The aria necessitates a mature, powerful voice with impeccable technique.

“Allmächt’ge Jungfrau,” also referred to as Elisabeth’s Prayer, is an aria “in which she begs for release from life and yearns to be admitted into the blessed realm of the angels...It’s devotional mood is appropriate, and well sustained in an orchestral prelude, but the aria lacks any strongly defined character, and its woodwind accompaniment is monotonous.”<sup>382</sup> Although the aria is quite lengthy, most of the melody is contained to the middle voice causing this aria to be a nice choice for younger, developing dramatic sopranos. It will also allow the singer to delve into deeper emotional areas as the prayer is sung by a woman who has had a tremendous amount of life experience. While working with a singer in pre-production, Wagner wrote that the singer asked, “if I really thought that this music would achieve the effect I desired if sung by a young and pretty voice without any soul or without that experience of life which alone could give real expression to the interpretation. I sighed and said that, in that case, the youthfulness of the voice and its possessor must make up for what was lacking.”<sup>383</sup>

### *Lohengrin*

*Lohengrin* is a romantic opera in three acts approximately three and a half hours in length and composed from 1845-48. The opera is set in the early Middle Ages. This opera, “dubbed a ‘romantic opera’ by Wagner, is something of a paradox: it has a fairy-

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381. Mark Ross Clark, *Guide to the Aria Repertoire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 140.

382. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 99.

383. *Ibid.*, 86.

tale subject, a tragic outcome and the outward trappings of a historical drama. Mutually exclusive opposites, myth and history, fairy tale and tragedy, are forced together without any of them suffering perceptible harm.”<sup>384</sup> The three main characters, Lohengrin, Elsa, and Ortrud each represent different religious and social customs. Lohengrin represents Christianity, Elsa represents dependence, and Ortrud represents paganism and independence.<sup>385</sup> Orchestrally, Wagner was developing new roles for the instruments, composing “melodically independent phrases for the subordinate parts, giving them the opportunity for individual expression. They are not heard as separate, distinct parts, but the fact that they have something to say, even though we do not understand it in detail, contributes to the richness and differentiation of the whole.”<sup>386</sup> Along with *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* was one of Wagner’s most popular operas during the decade of the 1850s.<sup>387</sup>

The role of Elsa requires a pure voice that sparkles through lots of dynamic variations.<sup>388</sup> According to Birgit Nilsson, Elsa is a rhythmically unpredictable role.<sup>389</sup> This makes the role difficult to memorize. But, it is a perfect Wagner role to begin with for the younger singer since the dramatic vocal demands are not as great as later Wagner

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384. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 35.

385. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 114.

386. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 37.

387. *Ibid.*, 3.

388. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 325.

389. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 147.

operas. Jonathan Lewsey states that Act I established the “simplicity and innocence of Elsa’s nature” while in Act II “her trusting innocence is steadily and conclusively undermined.”<sup>390</sup> Therefore, a youthful vocal quality abounding in innocence, naivete, hopefulness, and longing is desired from the singer. At the opera’s end,

“Elsa has fulfilled her destiny. It could not be expected that Lohengrin and Elsa would have settled into an uninterrupted life of blissful domesticity. By clearing her name through divine intervention, by effecting the release of her brother from the sorcery which enslaved him and by learning the importance not only of obedience but also of transgression, Elsa has achieved more than it is given to most mortals to achieve.”<sup>391</sup>

“Einsam in trüben Tagen,” also commonly referred to as “Elsa’s Dream,” is Elsa’s opening aria where she tells of a dream of a knight who comes to her rescue and defense. According to Osborne, “Elsa’s aria begins gently, but becomes impassioned as she sings of the knight whom she has seen in her dream.”<sup>392</sup> “In this aria the voice...will suggest solitude and sorrow, marveling, slumber, boundless admiration, adoration, faith and generosity, and finally selfless dedication.”<sup>393</sup> It allows the singer to showcase a softness in the voice while building up to a dramatic climax at the end. The highest note is an Ab5; therefore, the tessitura is very forgiving for young singers working on developing their high notes. Elsa’s contrasting aria, “Euch Lüften, die mein Klagen” is where she sings of her gratefulness to the breeze for her upcoming marriage to Lohengrin

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390. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 45.

391. *Ibid.*, 47.

392. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 116.

393. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 326.



and an anticipated life of happiness. This aria truly should be sung as a prayer, using a floaty quality in the voice to match the text, instrumentation, and marked dynamic levels that only reach a *mezzo forte*.

According to Lewsey, “Ortrud is the daughter of Radbod, prince of Friesland. All Ortrud’s actions are motivated by her desire to regain the Brabantine throne.”<sup>394</sup> Ortrud is the only character who worships pagan gods, providing a complete contrast to the rest of the characters who belong to the Christian faith.<sup>395</sup> As a character, Ortrud’s motivations are spurred by “self-interest, political ambition and greed. She is consumed with negative emotions; bitterness, resentment and hatred.”<sup>396</sup> Astrid Varnay describes Ortrud as a sorceress and seductress from aristocracy who is fighting against Lohengrin because she truly believes her faith should be restored.<sup>397</sup> According to Dahlhaus, Ortrud is “the most active force in the outward action, in which she provides the visible counterpart to Lohengrin that Wagner’s theatrical instinct knew was necessary.”<sup>398</sup> The role is typically cast as a dramatic mezzo-soprano, contrasting Elsa’s lighter dramatic soprano. Ortrud’s music “is some of the most original and startling in the opera.”<sup>399</sup>

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394. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 169.

395. *Ibid.*

396. *Ibid.*, 171.

397. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 114.

398. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 36.

399. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 171.

“Entweihte Götter” is Ortrud’s aria where she “calls on her heathen gods to aid her vengeance and confound the vile beliefs of the apostates. She invokes Wotan and Freia, asking them to bless her with guile and deceit so that her revenge may be sweet.”<sup>400</sup> Although the role of Ortrud is sung by a dramatic mezzo-soprano, this aria requires the singer to access the upper range with dramatic declaration and sustained stamina. This short aria presents two sustained high A’s and two high A#’s that must be sung with power and purpose. The role is most appropriate for an aging dramatic soprano who is also looking to make a switch to the dramatic mezzo *Fach*, but this aria is a great study piece for a young dramatic soprano struggling with connecting to the high notes as well as singing with the lighter quality required of Elsa.

### *Tristan und Isolde*

*Tristan und Isolde* is a *Handlung* (action) opera in three acts approximately three hours and forty-five minutes in length and composed from 1857-59. “In 1872, in an essay disowning the expression ‘music drama’, Wagner defined his ‘dramas’ as ‘deeds of music which have become visible’.”<sup>401</sup> *Tristan und Isolde* was highly influenced by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer “believed that the preconscious Will was an expression of the sexual drive and its negation the road to salvation.”<sup>402</sup> Dahlhaus claims that the “text and the music are not simply equal in importance, which is a truism,

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400. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 120.

401. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 53.

402. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 549.

but their relationship in some places is better described as intercutting, rather than one of correspondence or mutual absorption.”<sup>403</sup> *Tristan und Isolde* is unlike any other opera “in its concentration upon the inner lives of its protagonists. It is an opera about love or, to be more precise, about desire and romantic yearning.”<sup>404</sup>

Isolde is an Irish princess who is engaged to a knight named Morold. Astrid

Varnay said:

“Isolde is able to take the initiative in every situation, regardless of where her determination might leave her in the end. While she is profoundly in love with Tristan, she isn’t dependent on him for anything. Their union is not based on dependency, but rather on the fact that their love for one another forms an imperative that holds valid, even if their relationship is outside the then-existent bounds of social mores”.<sup>405</sup>

Lewsey claims that Isolde “combines for the first time in Wagner’s operas the redemptive and destructive aspects of the Feminine. In one sense she saves Tristan from the sterile life of duty and responsibility to which he is enslaved. In another sense she emasculates him and renders him incompetent.”<sup>406</sup> He goes on to say that at “no time does Isolde display any indication of possessing the restraining powers of rationality. She is entirely at the mercy of her emotions.”<sup>407</sup>

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403. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 55-6.

404. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 142.

405. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 115.

406. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 112-3.

407. *Ibid.*, 113.

“Wie lachend sie” is Isolde’s long narrative in Act I. In this narrative, Isolde gives the opera’s background story of how her fiancé was killed by Tristan. When she moved to exact her revenge on Tristan, she fell in love with him instead. Tristan returns for Isolde to take her to marry King Marke in Cornwall. Tristan’s act angered Isolde more than her fiancé’s death and she plans to kill him. Osborne says:

“Isolde’s Narration, the only passage of exposition throughout *Tristan und Isolde*, and a splendid, though sole, opportunity for the dramatic soprano singing Isolde to enliven the external aspects of Wagner’s deliberately thin plot, builds to a marvellous [*sic*] climax in which she curses Tristan and utters an agonized plea for death for them both.”<sup>408</sup>

“Mild und leise,” also referred to as the “Liebestod,” is Isolde’s final love song to Tristan. While Tristan is dead in her arms Isolde hallucinates his coming back to life. The hallucinations grow stronger until Isolde collapses, dying alongside Tristan. Osborne describes her song as a “mystical reunion with her beloved Tristan. The words are, in themselves, almost devoid of meaning, but they carry the ecstatic music to a great climax of cosmic joy as Isolde finally sinks upon Tristan’s breast, transfigured by death to a higher state of immortal love.”<sup>409</sup> This final moment for Isolde must be emotionally portrayed as the finale to the entire story that has gone before her. After singing so dramatically, it is difficult to deliver this ethereal section that slowly builds to Isolde’s death. Astrid Varnay states that Isolde’s “Liebestod” at the end of the opera is the longest section of music without a rest.<sup>410</sup>

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408. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 144.

409. *Ibid.*, 150.

410. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 66.

The role of Isolde is the crowning glory in a dramatic soprano's career. In applying technique to a young Wagner Isolde, Frida Leider analyzed her diction while maintaining a legato line while also paying attention to the dynamic markings.<sup>411</sup> Before singing Isolde, Birgit Nilsson would sing a short warm up since Act I did not present any problems and she wanted to make sure her voice was not used up before the end of the opera.<sup>412</sup> After working and singing Isolde, Kirsten Flagstad's voice grew larger and darker the more she rested and her back muscles became so developed from the breathing that her clothes began to fit differently.<sup>413</sup> "The great challenge of this role for the interpreter is the ability to scale the heights of dramatic declamation and scale down to the tenderest lyricism. Isolde is a force of nature. Her passion has the force and inevitability of a mountain stream. It is incontrovertible."<sup>414</sup> Johanna Meier named Isolde as the one role that changed her life. She said,

"That was the role for which I became best known in later years. I was first offered the role when I was singing Tosca in Amsterdam and the director was Lotfi Mansouri. He was at that time the director of the Canadian Opera and he asked what would you think about doing Isolde for me in a couple of years. I said well, I've never spent any time in studying it but if you would like to experiment with that I would be very interested to try. So, I did spend several years preparing it and ultimately that was the role with which I had the greatest success both abroad and in the United States. I did about twelve to fifteen different productions. Of course, I mainly worked in Bayreuth. I was the first American to ever sing Isolde in

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411. Frida Leider, *Playing My Part*, trans. Charles Osborne. (London: Alma Classics Ltd., 1966), 57.

412. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 4.

413. Kirsten Flagstad, *The Flagstad Manuscript: An Autobiography* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1952), 57.

414. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 113.

Bayreuth. I did sing it in England and throughout Europe and at the Metropolitan and elsewhere in this country.”<sup>415</sup>

*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is an opera in three acts approximately four hours and fifteen minutes in length and was composed from 1845-67. The opera is based on the German tradition of Mastersinging and song contests. The art of Mastersinging, dated as early as 1311 in Mainz, “reached its peak in 16<sup>th</sup> century Nürnberg, the time and place of Wagner’s opera and also of the historical Hans Sachs, who was every bit as influential as depicted in Wagner’s opera.”<sup>416</sup> In an essay written by Eduard Hanslick in 1870, he described *Die Meistersinger* as a

“remarkable creation, uniquely consistent in method, extremely earnest, novel in structure, rich in imaginative and even brilliant characteristics, often tiring and exasperating, but always unusual. It is of compelling interest, if only as a phenomenon; whether one is pleased or repelled depends upon one’s conception of musical and dramatic beauty.”<sup>417</sup>

Eva, one of only two female roles compared to fifteen male roles, is the daughter of Pogner and in love with Walther von Stolzing. Eva, her father’s prized possession, is being offered as a gift to the winner of the song contest. At her core, Eva is “simply a young girl in love, enduring all the happiness and miseries that that involves.”<sup>418</sup> As a Wagner heroine, Eva is the “least complicated” and “least narcissistic” female

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415. Johanna Meier, phone interview by author, New York City, July 5, 2016.

416. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 150.

417. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 160-1.

418. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 57.

character.<sup>419</sup> Lewsey asserts that Eva “can appear a somewhat pallid heroine, for she exists principally as a reflection of the desires of all those around her. The fact of her being in her father’s gift places her in a negative relation to the over-all plot from the outset. Yet she has a mind of her own.”<sup>420</sup>

“O Sachs! Mein Freund” is Eva’s narrative in Act III. She tells Sachs that she cares for him only as a friend, and thanks him for helping her to identify love which she has found with Walther. The narrative begins with a large leap to a high B5 and continues through lots of *passaggio* singing and leaps to higher notes. Due to the opera’s length and the sheer number of male roles, *Die Meistersinger* is not often performed.

### *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

*Der Ring des Nibelungen* is a stage festival play intended for 3 days with a preliminary evening. Wagner spent from 1848 to 1874 bringing this opera to life.<sup>421</sup> Wagner’s use of leitmotifs is prevalent throughout all four operas, binding the story together and allowing the audience to identify emotions, characters, places, and things by their musical sound. Wagner compiled the libretto from the “medieval German *Das Nibelungenlied* and the older Scandinavian *Edda*, myths concerning the Norse gods and heroes.”<sup>422</sup>

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419. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 57.

420. Ibid.

421. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 82.

422. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 191.

“Wagner turned to the myth in search of the ‘eternal fundamental emotions of the heart’, of which he understood music to be the language... In the historico-philosophical construction designed to bestow universal historical significance on the musical drama of the Nibelung’s ring, the return to a mythological past simultaneously looked forward to a utopian future... the dramatic idea of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which is about nothing less than the downfall of a world of law and force, and the dawn of a utopian age: though Siegfried and Brünnhilde fall victims to the old order, they are the first representatives of the new.”<sup>423</sup>

### *Das Rheingold*

*Das Rheingold* is one act with four scenes approximately two and a half hours in length and composed from 1851-54. The opera’s name is derived from the gold that resides at the bottom of the Rhine River. Alberich’s theft of this gold is the launching point for the entire drama. The gold is a symbol “open to a wide range of interpretations: the brilliant light of human consciousness; the pure unsullied magnificence inherent in the bounties of nature...”<sup>424</sup> “Alberich’s theft and the sacrifice that he makes in renouncing all human love and compassion, in order to gain worldly power, leads to untold miseries for all who come into contact with the gold thereafter. In turning the gold to selfish materialistic ends Alberich debases its true significance.”<sup>425</sup> In Porges’ notes from actively witnessing Wagner’s rehearsal of *The Ring*, he states: “Nowhere in the *Ring* is the demand for an ideal art rooted in fidelity to nature more pressing and yet more

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423. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 80-1.

424. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 183.

425. Ibid.



difficult to meet than in *Das Rheingold* – indeed its production can be regarded as a test case for a proper understanding of Richard Wagner’s music – dramatic style.”<sup>426</sup>

“According to the theory Wagner outlined in *Opera and Drama*...the ‘recurrence of melodic elements’ creates the principle behind ‘a unified artistic form which spreads not merely over limited areas of the drama, but over the whole drama, linking it all together’. The ‘confined melody’ of the traditional kind of aria was to be expanded into the ‘endless melody’ that embraces a whole work.”<sup>427</sup>

The opening scene features the three Rhinemaidens playfully swimming and engaging in dialogue. Lewsey says,

“There is little that is maidenly about these three nymphs. They are nature sprites; the most elemental beings to appear in the *Ring* drama. They are almost entirely instinctive and yet they have been given by their father, the River Rhine (synonymous with life itself), the responsibility of guarding the gold that resides in the depths of the Rhine.”<sup>428</sup>

Porges says that all “the Rhinemaidens’ utterances must be infused with a naïve gaiety...”<sup>429</sup> Of the Three Rhinemaidens, Woglinde and Wellgunde are listed as sopranos. These characters also appear in the fourth opera of the cycle, *Götterdämmerung*. The Rhinemaiden music is mostly sung in ensemble with each other with an exception for the opening of the opera.

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426. Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing ‘The Ring:’ An Eye-Witness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7.

427. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 114.

428. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 183.

429. Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing ‘The Ring:’ An Eye-Witness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 9.

Freia, one of the gods, has been promised as payment for the giants building Valhalla for Wotan. This causes a problem for Freia as well as the other gods as she is the one who gathers the golden apples that keeps the gods youthful. Freia feels completely forsaken by her family until the prospect of paying with the Rhindemaiden's gold appeases the giants. Although she does not have a lot of music to sing, her role in the drama is imperative to the god's survival.

“Freia is the embodiment of love, youth and beauty and as such represents all that is being put in jeopardy by Wotan and Alberich's relentless lusting after worldly power. Some of her music will later be associated with Sieglinde, another victim of a warped morality that defends social order and temporal power above all else.”<sup>430</sup>

### *Die Walküre*

*Die Walküre* is the second opera of *The Ring Cycle* and has three acts approximately three hours and forty-five minutes in length and composed from 1851-56. Lewsey states that *Die Walküre* “is Wotan's drama...at which Wotan recognizes that there is no solution to his dilemma...Brünnhilde and Fricka almost fade to allegorical figures representing the two different forces at war in Wotan.”<sup>431</sup> Of the four operas, *Die Walküre* is the one that could most likely be performed on its own. The “orchestral writing is often thrilling, but by now Wagner has found a way to integrate his voice parts into the overall structure without sacrificing their lyrical independence...” it “is still primarily a work for solo voices.”<sup>432</sup>

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430. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 69.

431. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 120.

432. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 216.

Sieglinde is one of the twin offspring of Wotan's union with a human woman. "Sieglinde was abducted from her home and forced into a loveless marriage with the warrior chieftain, Hunding. She has endured a miserable marriage for as many years as Siegmund has pursued his own ill-fated journey through a hostile world."<sup>433</sup> "Sieglinde's destiny is one of the most affecting in all Wagner's works. Her significance in the *Ring* drama as the mother of the hero is critical."<sup>434</sup> Birgit Nilsson regards Sieglinde as a "grateful part" and that any singer would have to try to fail in this role.<sup>435</sup>

"Der Männer Sippe," Sieglinde's first narrative, "is of such eloquence that it transcends its arioso form to become almost a bel canto aria. From this point to the end of the act Wagner's music is at its most beautiful, yet simultaneously obedient to the demands of the drama, hastening it forward with an urgent lyrical flow."<sup>436</sup> In this extended narrative, Sieglinde tells Siegmund that she has secretly given her husband, Hunding, a drug that will allow Siegmund to escape. Also, she tells him about the sword in the tree that no one is able to remove. In contrast, "Du bist der Lenz" is a short narrative where Sieglinde professes her love for Siegmund, despite him being her twin brother. "An urgent outpouring of love ensues, in which each speaks of having

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433. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 225.

434. *Ibid.*, 229.

435. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 65.

436. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 208-9.

recognized the other as in a dream.”<sup>437</sup> This aria is perfect for auditions and competitions because it is just a little over two minutes in length.

Brünnhilde makes her first entrance in Act II of *Die Walküre*. She is Wotan’s favorite daughter and has eight other sisters from Wotan’s union with Erda. Her role in *The Ring* “describes her odyssey from divine and virginal immortal to fully individuated human woman.”<sup>438</sup> It is in this opera that Brünnhilde truly shows her youth and zest for life before being transformed into a woman by Siegfried’s kiss.

“Hojotoho!” is Brünnhilde’s opening battle cry at the beginning of Act II. “This is surely one of the most spectacular of all operatic entrances, especially since Wagner indicates that Brünnhilde should ‘jump from rock to rock’, while singing.”<sup>439</sup> Birgit Nilsson intimated that Brünnhilde’s “Hojotoho” cry is difficult to sing.<sup>440</sup> Deborah Voigt intimated that you must “...be hooked into the middle voice.”<sup>441</sup> Although challenging, this dramatic opening is one of the most beloved in the entire cycle and is often requested on recital programs given by dramatic sopranos. Osborne points out that the “Valkyrie’s

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437. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 209.

438. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 23.

439. *Ibid.*

440. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 155.

441. Deborah Voigt, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-To-Earth Diva* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 230.

battle-cry has become so widely known out of context and used for purposes of satire so frequently that its intended effect is not easy now to achieve in performance.”<sup>442</sup>

The beginning of Act III introduces Brünnhilde’s sisters, the Valkyries. Each Valkyrie has been roaming the world slaying warriors. The “Hojotoho!” battle cry is also shared at the beginning of Act III by Gerhilde and Helmwige. The Ride of the Valkyries is some of the most recognized music in the world combining the “warlike theme of the Valkyries with Brünnhilde’s battle-cry. Its dotted rhythm and pulsating energy contribute to an exciting opening scene.”<sup>443</sup> Most of their music contains solo phrases of declamatory text and ensemble singing. Their role in the third act is imperative and they have some of the most beautiful but challenging music to sing.

### *Siegfried*

*Siegfried* is in three acts approximately four hours and fifteen minutes in length and was composed between 1851-71. *Siegfried* “is, in structure, the simplest of the *Ring* components, an opera consisting of nine dialogues, three in each act, for various combinations of characters.”<sup>444</sup> The structure may be simple, but the music is difficult. It is this opera that is most like a fairy tale. “Characteristic motives of *Siegfried*...in a sense block the musical passage of time and are at odds with the progress of cadential harmony

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442. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 210.

443. *Ibid.*, 214.

444. *Ibid.*, 230.

towards a goal. They do not press forward but persist in their own being, and thus come to express a state of nature, outside history.”<sup>445</sup>

Brünnhilde is not awakened from her sleep until Act III. “Brünnhilde has been symbolically dead; now she is reborn.”<sup>446</sup> Birgit Nilsson said, “The *Siegfried* Brünnhilde always cost me more in nerves and stress than the other two Brünnhildes put together.”<sup>447</sup> Deborah Voigt said you must “...send high C’s into the balcony.”<sup>448</sup> “Ewig war ich” is Brünnhilde’s narrative to Siegfried after he awakens her with a kiss, causing her to fall in love instantly. This narrative is lengthy with many melodic leaps culminating in a high C towards the end. At the end of the opera, Brünnhilde “bids a light-hearted farewell to the resplendent pomp of the gods as she and Siegfried greet the day, the sun, the world. With their ecstatic love duet, the opera ends exultantly.”<sup>449</sup>

### *Götterdämmerung*

*Götterdämmerung* has a prologue and three acts approximately four hours and fifteen minutes in length and was composed from 1848-74. The story of Siegfried’s death

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445. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 127.

446. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 26.

447. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 66.

448. Deborah Voigt, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-To-Earth Diva* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 230.

449. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 241.

is a culmination of all the motivic instances heard in the first three operas, providing reminiscence for the audience.<sup>450</sup> *Götterdämmerung* is a

“dramatic symphony: ‘dramatic’ not only in the superficial sense that the symphony, the ‘orchestral melody’, is the accompaniment to a drama, but also insofar as the symphonic function and weight are founded in the special conceptual and dramatic construction of the work: the relationship between the divine myth and the heroic drama.”<sup>451</sup>

After attending a dress rehearsal for *Götterdämmerung*, Grieg wrote:

“that *Götterdämmerung* is the most effective of the dramas and the one with the most compelling action. In it, all that has gone before is resolved, and the fates of the gods and of men are fulfilled. The use of a chorus seems to involve all mankind—and what an effect it makes! By allowing the Rhinemaidens to recover the gold in the end, Wagner underlines the message that, in the hands of man, it is a force for evil and intrigue.”<sup>452</sup>

The opening scene features three Norns, “tall women in dark, veil-like drapery, who weave the rope of fate on which the future of the world depends.”<sup>453</sup> The Third Norn is designated as a dramatic soprano. “As they weave the rope of the world’s destiny, the Norns tell one another...the story of Wotan, his spear and its runes, the ring and its history. Finally, their rope snaps as the curse motif is insisted upon by the bass trumpet. The three Norns start up in terror, grasping the pieces of broken rope” vanishing “into the depths...”<sup>454</sup> This opening section is approximately fifteen minutes in length and features solo lines of the Norn’s dialogue as well as ensemble singing.

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450. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 136.

451. *Ibid.*, 135.

452. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 244.

453. *Ibid.*, 245-6.

454. *Ibid.*, 246.

Gutrune, as well as her brother Gunther, are the head of the Gibichung tribe. To win Siegfried's love, Gutrune creates a special potion for Siegfried to drink to make him fall in love with her and forget Brünnhilde. Gutrune's love is snatched away when Hagen, her half-brother, kills Siegfried. Lewsey asserts:

“Gutrune has no mysterious past to discover or uncover. She is...ingenuous, if not exactly guileless, with an average dose of cunning and determination when it comes to fulfilling her sexual needs. Gutrune pays a heavy price for interfering with Nature, through the use of the magic potion administered to Siegfried. Her only sins are thoughtlessness and lack of imagination.”<sup>455</sup>

The role of Gutrune is small but longer than Freia in *Das Rheingold*. It is an appropriate role for young developing dramatic sopranos to learn before the more prominent Wagner women.

In this last opera of *The Ring Cycle*, Brünnhilde has an “emphatic, unreserved love, which blots out every other consideration, switches abruptly to insensate hatred when Siegfried betrays her, only to be transformed back just as immediately into love when she sees through the treachery to which Siegfried has fallen victim.”<sup>456</sup> This “one-time daughter of the god has discovered the joys of love and of sex. She is released into new life. As it was formerly her mission to give new life to the dead heroes, levied from

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455. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 91.

456. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 134.



the world's battlefields, now she herself is reborn."<sup>457</sup> Debbie Voigt mentions in her book that *Götterdämmerung* "is an exercise in pacing and is very dramatic vocally."<sup>458</sup>

"Starke Scheite schichten mir dort" is Brünnhilde's first extended narrative of nearly ten minutes in the last scene of Act III. She reminisces over Siegfried's nobility and finally understands why he never fulfilled his promise to marry her. She directs the building of the funeral pyre to burn Siegfried's body. The end of this narrative flows directly into "Fliegt heim, ihr Raben." In this narrative, Brünnhilde calls on Loge, the god of fire, to set Valhalla ablaze, eliminating the gods that caused her so much pain. Brünnhilde then sets Siegfried's funeral pyre on fire, mounts her horse, and rides into the fire. These last two sections of music for Brünnhilde are dramatically and musically challenging. This scene, often referred to as the Immolation, contains seventeen key changes and nine meter changes.<sup>459</sup> Osborne describes this final scene as Brünnhilde "bidding the vassals to stack and light a pyre by the shore of the Rhine" while "she delivers Siegfried's funeral oration, remembering him lovingly, and castigating Wotan for having sacrificed him."<sup>460</sup>

In conclusion, Brünnhilde is the "paradigm of a future human race. But the Utopia to which she looks forward is a negative one: reconciliation is to be achieved only

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457. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 27.

458. Deborah Voigt, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-To-Earth Diva* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 230.

459. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 66.

460. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 256.

through renunciation, not through love. A world that is nothing but predestined fate and inescapable entanglements is to end in universal resignation and denial of the self.”<sup>461</sup>

When asked what role changed her life, Debbie Voigt had this to say.

“And then Brünnhilde, without question, changed my life. It’s so epic and there’s nowhere to go from Brünnhilde. She’s such a complete character and the journey that we see her take from the minute we meet her to where she goes is like nothing else in opera. I defy anyone to tell me of any operatic character that has that kind of life over the course of three evenings. She goes from a young tomboy to becoming mortal and falling in love. Then the revenge that she feels over the hatred and betrayal and the ultimate acceptance of how that all went and why she is where she is and what she sacrifices to right the world. There’s no other character like that in opera.”<sup>462</sup>

### *Parsifal*

*Parsifal* is a stage dedication play in three acts approximately four hours to four and a half hours in length and was composed from 1865-82. The origination of *Parsifal* initially established the expectation that the opera would only be staged at Wagner’s theatre in Bayreuth.<sup>463</sup> “All his life Wagner contemplated writing a dramatization of the life of Christ. *Parsifal* is the nearest he came to it.”<sup>464</sup> It is conceivable to view *Parsifal* “merely as a sickly...homoerotic fantasy about a group of knights who allow no woman to invade their realm; a slow-moving opera, the extreme length of which is disproportionate to its musical and dramatic worth. On the surface, it is a work of pious

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461. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 140.

462. Debbie Voigt, phone interview by author, New York City, May 24, 2016.

463. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 264.

464. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 176.

Christianity, although Wagner had come to detest Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism.”<sup>465</sup> Being the last opera Wagner wrote, it is appropriate to conclude that “*Parsifal* is a work of summation, in which the composer gathered and joined together the threads of his past.”<sup>466</sup>

“Kundry is the most complex of all Wagner’s characters, combining elements culled from many different world myths.”<sup>467</sup> “Linking the two worlds is Kundry, who once laughed at Christ on the cross and is condemned to live for eternity, both as a decoy and prostitute in Klingsor’s castle, and as a repentant slave in the kingdom of the Grail.”<sup>468</sup> Astrid Varnay says that Kundry personifies several different women. They include Herodias from the Bible, Gundryggia, a Celtic demon, the Wandering Jew (legend) but as a female, and Mary Magdalene.<sup>469</sup> Some descriptions call her a “strange witch-like creature” who changes into a beautiful woman when she attempts to seduce Parsifal.<sup>470</sup> “Kundry longs for the forgiveness of Christ, at whose sufferings she laughed,

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465. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 271.

466. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 144.

467. Jonathan Lewsey, *Who’s Who and What’s What in Wagner* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 121.

468. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 556-7.

469. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 116.

470. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 273.

yet the image of reconciliation that she sees before her darkens and distorts into a Black Mass.”<sup>471</sup>

“Ich sah das Kind” is some of the most beautiful and melodic music Kundry is given to sing. The music perfectly portrays a lullaby-style as Kundry tells Parsifal about his mother and the circumstances surrounding his birth. Once Parsifal grew up and left, his mother grieved herself to death. “Kundry’s lengthy narrative, is a voluptuous outpouring of feeling, part erotic and part quasi-maternal.”<sup>472</sup> The beauty and sadness of this tale is told with an abundance of melodic chromaticism, supple orchestration, and lyric lines. The aria is narrative “of something in the past” and “has an important part to play in the seduction scene, which it requires the insights of psychoanalysis to interpret.”<sup>473</sup>

“Seit Ewigkeiten hare ich deiner,” Kundry’s second aria in Act II, is much longer and dramatic than her first aria. Kundry engages in telling Parsifal about her actions that resulted in being cursed. Throughout this exchange she continues to attempt seducing Parsifal, hoping it will absolve her of her sin. Because of the length of this section of music it would be difficult to present it as a stand-alone aria.

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471. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 153.

472. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Wagner* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1990), 279.

473. Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 147.

## Jules Massenet 1842-1912

Jules Massenet is one of the most recognized French composers of the late nineteenth century. Growing up, he learned music quickly and taught composition at the Paris Conservatory, directly influencing the style of many young composers.<sup>474</sup> His most famous operas include *Herodiade*, *Manon*, *Werther*, and *Thaïs*. Other prominent works include overtures, suites, cantatas, oratorios, and approximately 200 songs.<sup>475</sup> “Massenet has indisputably a style of writing peculiar to himself.”<sup>476</sup> He has been accused of trying lots of different styles but not coming to master his own unique compositional style.<sup>477</sup> He was masterful at his use of poetry, “sensuous charm,” and his use of “a richly-coloured [*sic*] and varied instrumentation, and an always interesting and often original harmonic treatment.”<sup>478</sup> He was also more prone to feature weaker heroines in his operas.<sup>479</sup>

### *Le Cid*

*Le Cid* is an opera in four acts with a libretto by Louis Gallet, Edward Blau, and Adolphe d’Ennery and written from 1885-1888.<sup>480</sup> According to Arthur Hervey, *Le Cid* is

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474. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 613.

475. *Ibid.*

476. Arthur Hervey, *Masters of French Music* (Plainview, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1976), 203.

477. *Ibid.*, 195.

478. *Ibid.*, 181.

479. *Ibid.*

480. Otto T. Salzer, ed. *The Massenet Compendium*, Vol. 1 (Fort Lee, NJ: Otto T. Salzer, 1984), 56.

one of Massenet's greatest works.<sup>481</sup> The plot centers around a "confrontation of a heroine with the murderer of her father...After Chimène learns of the death of her father, she moves from knight to knight on the stage searching for her father's murderer until she finds him in the eyes of her lover, Rodrigue."<sup>482</sup> "With this opera Massenet solved the problem of constructing a dramatic structure without sacrificing the melodic lifeline of the opera"...the "score is constructed as a whole, and its musical parts flow into one another without abrupt interruption. The recitatives are sung, accompanied by dramatically meaningful music of fully emancipated orchestration."<sup>483</sup>

Chimène is the daughter of Count Gormas in Burgos. The role of Chimène is written for a dramatic soprano but can also be sung by a *Lirico-spinto* who possesses dramatic capabilities.<sup>484</sup> Chimène's Act III aria, "Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux," beautifully portrays her feelings over her father's death at the hands of her lover. She realizes there is no outcome other than heartache and sorrow. The varied emotions she experiences in this aria are presented with dramatic register shifts and moments of recitative-like passages in the middle of the aria. This aria is the most well-known from this opera and is a fantastic choice for French literature.

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481. Arthur Hervey, *Masters of French Music* (Plainview, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1976), 193.

482. Otto T. Salzer, ed. *The Massenet Compendium*, Vol. 1 (Fort Lee, NJ: Otto T. Salzer, 1984), 57.

483. *Ibid.*, 66.

484. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985). 85.

## Giacomo Puccini 1858-1924

Giacomo Puccini is one of the most well-known composers whose operas are consistently performed all over the world. His operas have one of the most far-reaching influences on non-musical culture, with the probability of this demographic having heard of a Puccini opera. His “music is essentially Italian in its easy-flowing melody, its clearly pointed dramatic effect, and its brightly coloured [*sic*] orchestration.”<sup>485</sup> Harmonically, his work is not considered modern but he used fresh sonorities that actively engage the listener with enough variation and evolvment to garner continued interest.<sup>486</sup> Stylistically, he developed the older Italian style with a new twist.<sup>487</sup> As a man, he made friends easily, was lovely and respectful to the people he met, and made others feel like they had been seen.<sup>488</sup>

Italian opera has always been a big proponent of keeping with tradition, and with this in mind Puccini desired to deliver a new, improved style through his compositions.<sup>489</sup> Puccini’s “sense of dramatic pacing was acute, in particular his ability to juxtapose action sections with ones of lyrical repose; and he had a masterly control over balancing the various systems – words, music and staging – that make up an opera, only rarely allowing indulgence of one aspect over the others.”<sup>490</sup> “In bringing his idiom up to date without

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485. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 848.

486. *Ibid.*

487. *Ibid.*

488. Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 474.

489. *Ibid.*, 477.

490. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 323.

renouncing the conquests of his youth he revealed a sure instinct for the ‘modernisms’ it permitted him to draw upon.”<sup>491</sup> “From *Manon* and *Mimi*, through *Tosca*, *Butterfly*, *Minnie*, *Angelica*, to *Turandot*, there can be detected a progression in Puccini’s demands upon the soprano voice. I am not speaking here of weight of voice, of lyric or dramatic, but of Puccini’s demands of range and tessitura...”<sup>492</sup> Puccini’s music is beautiful, ripe with lush melodies, dramatic moments, unlimited staging possibilities, and many costume choices that provide a visual appeal. There are many of his operas that are well-suited to the dramatic soprano *Fach*.

### *Manon Lescaut*

*Manon Lescaut* is a lyric drama in four acts approximately two hours long and was composed from 1889-1892 with revisions in 1893 and 1922. *Manon Lescaut* was born at the end of the nineteenth century at a time when “Italian opera composers gave increasing prominence to the orchestra...”<sup>493</sup> Due to the number of librettists working on the plot, *Manon Lescaut* ended up a bit damaged giving Puccini “no choice but to deemphasize the plot and to stake everything on the musical characterization of the two protagonists.”<sup>494</sup> “*Manon Lescaut* is more a ‘character opera’ than a ‘plot opera,’” and is “the most Verdian of Puccini’s works.”<sup>495</sup> In addition to Mozart, Wagner, and Verdi,

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491. Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 477.

492. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 216-7.

493. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 129.

494. *Ibid.*

495. *Ibid.*, 130.



Puccini had “the ability to make, when desirable, almost instantaneous transitions from one color or mood to that of the next episode.”<sup>496</sup> In summary, the “most distinctive aspect of *Manon Lescaut*...is the large number of melodies he uses thematically; that is, he repeats them, in whole or in part, at later points in the score to re-evoke a character, situation, or emotion.”<sup>497</sup>

Manon’s character is “part of a world made up of bravado, wantonness, suffering, and despair.”<sup>498</sup> Ashbrook continues by saying that for the role of Manon “the chief problem is not the tessitura,...although this presents a few tricky moments, but the difficulty of projecting clearly at times over the tumult in the pit.”<sup>499</sup> “Manon’s definition of love would have to be all-embracing, allowing her to be deceitful, unfaithful to her lover. Her death, sad as it is, does not redeem her...She is more the victim of a stern legal system...Manon’s end is due simply to bad luck.”<sup>500</sup>

Manon has several arias, contrasting each other and highlighting Manon’s situation which is different for each act. Her first aria in Act II is “In quelle trine morbide.” The aria contains a brightness, evenness of delivery, and simplicity within the expression.<sup>501</sup> This short aria is divided into two sections, when Manon “begins to

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496. William Ashbrook. *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 37.

497. *Ibid.*, 41.

498. *Ibid.*, 34.

499. *Ibid.*, 37.

500. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 114.

501. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 204.

contrast the chilling present with the warmth of the past.”<sup>502</sup> The melody is beautiful, flowy, and dream-like. The majority of the aria sits in *the passaggio* with dramatic leaps upward. Manon’s Act IV aria, “Sola, perduta abbandonata” provides a great contrast. This aria represents Puccini’s “first full-scale death scene” finding Manon left alone and not wanting to die.<sup>503</sup> This aria requires a “power of expression,” with long legato lines requiring an excellent use of breath support.<sup>504</sup> The short dramatic phrases coupled with funeral march sounds perfectly bring Manon’s story to an end with her tragic death.

### *Tosca*

*Tosca* is an opera in three acts approximately two hours in length and composed from 1896-99. The opera is set in Rome in the summer of 1800. Puccini based this opera on a hugely popular French drama by Sardou immediately after the first performances of *Edgar* had taken place.<sup>505</sup> Even though Puccini was taken with *Tosca* so quickly, his zeal to write an opera about her began to wane after delays from his librettist, Illica.<sup>506</sup> Franco Serpa said that *Tosca* “is the only case of a project rejected by Puccini but then taken up by him again some years later and carried to completion.”<sup>507</sup> Musically, Puccini’s “melody and the music flow and color...include a secret, intense melancholy, a delicate

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502. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 40.

503. *Ibid.*, 34.

504. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 205-6.

505. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 154.

506. *Ibid.*, 157.

507. *Ibid.*

sadness, and the constant premonition of pain and death in the sentiment of love, even in its very first manifestations.”<sup>508</sup> *Tosca* perfectly conveys Puccini’s fascination with “the love impulse and the image of death...” and holds its rightful place of popularity in opera houses all over the world.<sup>509</sup>

“At first glance, Tosca might seem the most Verdian of Puccini heroines: a woman who turns murderess and commits suicide for love. And yet, in the first act...she reveals all her feminine vulnerability; and her big aria, after all, tells us that she has lived only for art and love, for personal concerns.”<sup>510</sup> Originally, the role of Tosca was expected to be sung in the *veristic* style. “Veristic is sometimes used to describe the style of singing demanded by *Tosca*, a style differing from, even opposed to, the finesse and stamina demanded by the great Verdi roles.”<sup>511</sup> As a character, Tosca is an adult, “quite devoid of youthful innocence and intrinsic goodness.”<sup>512</sup> Vocally, Puccini desired a dramatic soprano who could present great power and range as well as display a dramatic temperament matching the vocal quality.<sup>513</sup>

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508. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 161.

509. *Ibid.*, 162.

510. *Ibid.*, 116.

511. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 80.

512. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 165.

513. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 88-9.

“Vissi d’arte” requires vocal strength coupled with tenderness, dynamic variation, and lots of legato singing.<sup>514</sup> “In this aria Tosca speaks as a woman; she is not acting, but revealing her basically devout and generous nature. With great skill Puccini paints her throughout the score, showing many facets of her volatile temperament and her ever-present sensuality.”<sup>515</sup> Rhythmically speaking, it is important for the singer to be able to accurately sing duple rhythms against the triplet accompaniment in the orchestra. Carol Vaness made some important remarks concerning the performance of “Vissi d’arte.” She said one should begin naturally and not too loudly. The language is the most important component. The Bb at the end can be held as long as it feels good, especially for younger singers.<sup>516</sup>

### *Madama Butterfly*

*Madama Butterfly* is a Japanese tragedy in three acts approximately two hours in length. The second and third versions of the opera are in two acts with Act II in two parts and the fourth version in three acts. The two act version was composed from 1901-03 with the revised second version completed in 1904 and further revisions in 1905.<sup>517</sup>

*Madama Butterfly* is based on a true story portrayed in David Belasco’s one-act play, *Madam Butterfly*.<sup>518</sup> The opera’s premiere at La Scala on February 17, 1904 was not

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514. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 211.

515. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 87.

516. Mark Ross Clark, *Guide to the Aria Repertoire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 124.

517. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 331.

518. Mosco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1979), 10.

received well, prompting Puccini to write to his friend, “I am still shocked by all that happened – not so much for what they did to my poor Butterfly, but for all the poison they spat on me as an artist and as a man...”<sup>519</sup> Therefore, after three months of revisions, the opera was shown again in Brescia to great acclaim by the audience.<sup>520</sup> The popularity of *Madama Butterfly* has only continued up to the present day.

“Butterfly...is a victim of a cultural clash, a sign of Puccini’s curiosity about exotic places and of his interest...in local color, especially in faraway localities.”<sup>521</sup>

“Butterfly is certainly Puccini’s richest drama, and its heroine is his most complicated character.”<sup>522</sup> When asked what role changed her life, Susan Bullock identified it as Butterfly. She said,

“It was the first time I’d had a real title role. Butterfly was a chance to really carry a show on my own and to really have to act and the production that I did was a grand production which was incredibly intense and incredibly real so there was nowhere else to hide. We worked on floating around sort of mock Japanese. It was really full on.”<sup>523</sup>

In addition, Victoria de los Angeles, one of the most popular professional singers of Puccini’s female characters, summed up Butterfly’s character perfectly. She said,

“Singing *Madam Butterfly* has always been a happy experience for me, first because she is such a fascinating and sympathetic character, and secondly because Puccini is so generous with the beautiful music he gives her. It is not easy, however to interpret her character in a way that is worthy of the composer, who

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519. Mosco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1979), 17.

520. *Ibid.*, 19.

521. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 116.

522. *Ibid.*, 117.

523. Susan Bullock, Skype interview by author, New York City, May 29, 2016.

looked so closely into her heart and expressed her feelings so perfectly in his music. She is a sentimental creature, but for me she is also very real.”<sup>524</sup>

She continues by saying the role of Butterfly is the most taxing of any Puccini female role due to her time on stage, the large variety of music she sings, and the amount of dramatic singing at the end of the opera.<sup>525</sup> Singher contends that the role requires text painting, moments of intensity with a large dynamic range, and a sincere outlook.<sup>526</sup>

Musically, the exotic score “wafts a strange alluring aroma over the greater part of the opera.”<sup>527</sup> Vocally, Butterfly must portray this young exoticism with a warm sound, lacking heaviness but fueled with ringing lightness in the quality. There are many extended passages sitting right in the *passaggio* with upward leaps that must be negotiated with care. Butterfly’s entrance is an example of this. Act I concludes with Butterfly and Pinkerton’s beautiful love duet. The dramatic intensity builds throughout this long duet; therefore, pacing is of utmost importance.

Butterfly’s first aria, “Un bel di, vedremo” in the second act, immediately follows an exchange with Suzuki. In this aria, Butterfly envisions Pinkerton’s return, vividly describing his arrival, her actions after he comes to her, and her unshakable faith that he will return. Butterfly’s final aria at the end of Act III, “Tu, tu piccolo Iddio” must be sung with agitated despondence, “telling us that Butterfly’s last thought before her self-

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524. Mosco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1979), 7.

525. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

526. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 200-2.

527. Mosco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1979), 45.

immolation is for her child.”<sup>528</sup> Possessing a high level of vocal skill is required for both arias. It is difficult to portray such a young character who has such a large amount of difficult life experiences. Butterfly is a role to feel in your soul as it relies on emotion, not logical thought patterns.

### *La Fanciulla del West*

*La fanciulla del West* is an opera in three acts approximately two hours long and composed from 1908-10. Puccini based *La Fanciulla del West* on another play by David Belasco.<sup>529</sup> Due to the complexity of the music, “...the opera needs singing actors of the first quality in order to succeed on stage.”<sup>530</sup> Due to personal family issues and disagreements with his librettist, *Fanciulla* took over three years to complete. Musically, “*Fanciulla* is harmonically and orchestrally one of Puccini’s most innovative scores, and in these two areas represents a high point in experimentation and musical daring.”<sup>531</sup> Once the opera was completed, “Puccini had great confidence...He had survived seemingly insurmountable personal and professional challenges and produced what he believed to be an innovative work with a dynamic, modern musical expression...”<sup>532</sup>

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528. Mosco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1979), 67.

529. Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini & The Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 41.

530. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 334.

531. Ibid.

532. Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini & The Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 95.

The miners adore Minnie as she is “the central figure in...their lives...”<sup>533</sup> She “is a charismatic, quasi-sacred figure who is able to persuade the mob to abandon its agenda of vengeance through a message of forgiveness, love, and the promise of redemption.”<sup>534</sup> “She is moral...and with a vengeance; but her missionary zeal is on the surface...When Mr. Right comes along...she is easily persuaded to give him her ‘first kiss,’ which, it is legitimate to suspect, is Belasco’s and Puccini’s euphemism for her first something-else.”<sup>535</sup> The role of Minnie is often called “Minnie the Voice Wrecker” and it is the most technically difficult role Debbie Voigt ever learned.<sup>536</sup> Debbie lists in her book what to expect when singing Minnie. She says that Minnie is highly emotional, requiring you to sing into your extended range with moments of high coloratura all above a large orchestra.<sup>537</sup> She also lists Minnie as one of the roles that has changed her life. She said,

“I think that Minnie, the Girl of the Golden West, changed my life because I could identify with her in a lot of ways. She's American, blonde, and blue-eyed. She believed in the Bible and she treats these landlords with respect. They give her respect in return. I love her description of the relationship that she experienced in watching her parents which was not something I observed necessarily in my life.”<sup>538</sup>

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533. Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini & The Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 18.

534. *Ibid.*, 36.

535. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 118.

536. Deborah Voigt, *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-To-Earth Diva* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 240.

537. *Ibid.*

538. Deborah Voigt, phone interview by author, New York City, May 24, 2016.



“Laggiù nel Soledad” is Minnie’s first aria in Act I. It is shorter in length with recitative-like passages throughout before a brief legato section at the end, culminating in a high C. “Minnie’s melodic plainness and unprepared leap indicates her naiveté, lack of education, and unworldliness.”<sup>539</sup> Minnie’s Act II aria, “Oh, se sapeste” juxtaposes the Act I aria with a faster tempo and wide leaps. The dramatic ending on a high B is made more difficult by enunciating the last syllable of the word “entrar.” Overall, Minnie requires a lot of singing predominantly in the middle voice but with wide leaps to the top at dramatic moments.

### *Suor Angelica*

Puccini wrote three short operas after completing *La fanciulla del West* that were intended to be performed together in the same evening. These three are named *Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*, and together they form *Il trittico*. Of these three, *Il tabarro* and *Suor Angelica* are the only two with roles appropriate for a dramatic soprano. Puccini personally had a fondness for the subject of *Suor Angelica* as he had a sister living in a convent at the time, providing him with “an eccentric, intense emotional charge” lacking from the other two operas in *Il trittico*.<sup>540</sup> “Puccini’s contemporaries sensed the existence of a new, ‘modern’ Puccini” upon his completion of *La fanciulla del West* and *Il trittico*.<sup>541</sup> *Suor Angelica* “scales the heights of emotional tension, somewhere between rhetoric and sadism, the precise musical characterization is striking, determined

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539. Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini & The Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 20.

540. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 232.

541. *Ibid.*, 234.

as it is by a homogenous orchestral color very different from the refined color of *Il tabarro* and surely more sinuous and saccharine.”<sup>542</sup>

“Suor Angelica would seem to be the Puccini heroine par excellence: young and vulnerable, victim of the cruel world, forced into a convent for having produced an illegitimate child, and yet—despite her sin—supremely innocent, even childish.”<sup>543</sup> This role is most appropriate for a *Lirico spinto* with a versatile, colorful, and ringing vocal quality. She must have complete vocal control.<sup>544</sup> Technical issues in the voice must not exist.<sup>545</sup> The staging requires Angelica to be visible the entire opera without a chance to rest, making the emotional arc she is expected to portray that much more difficult. At the opera’s end, “...the nun’s suicide is the impulsive act of one who has suffered a cruel blow that was inflicted as brutally as possible. Dying, Angelica realizes she has committed a mortal sin and cries out for salvation.”<sup>546</sup>

“The scene between the formidable Princess and the tortured nun, frantic for news of her child, is one of the most powerful confrontations in Puccini’s operas.”<sup>547</sup> “Senza mamma,” Angelica’s climactic aria towards the end of the opera after she has learned about the death of her son, is often used in audition settings. The emotional and dramatic

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542. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 241.

543. *Ibid.*, 119.

544. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 207.

545. *Ibid.*, 208.

546. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 178.

547. *Ibid.*, 180.

possibilities are endless, as this marks the beginning of her descent into death. Ashbrook states, “The striking thing about this aria is its inwardness; there is no big climax, indeed it ends pianissimo on a high A supported by augmented harmony. Instead of cutting loose at this point, as he might have been tempted to do in his younger days, Puccini has achieved the power of restraint.”<sup>548</sup>

### *Turandot*

*Turandot* is an opera in three acts approximately one hour and forty-five minutes in length and composed from 1920-24. *Turandot* is the last opera Puccini wrote and is performed worldwide on a regular basis. The opera “was born from the fusion of diverse European traditions” and “it reflects in both its dramaturgy and its music the ideas that were currently sweeping across Europe.”<sup>549</sup> In Ashbrook’s opinion, the “score of *Turandot* is undeniably Puccini’s greatest achievement. Its exotic clangor, its virile impetus, and its brilliant orchestration are healthy signs of Puccini’s bold breaking of new ground.”<sup>550</sup> After Puccini’s unexpected death in 1924, Franco Alfano was nominated to take Puccini’s sketches of the final scene and complete the opera.<sup>551</sup> The opera’s success varied by country. The Italians “responded to the beauty and impressiveness of the score; they wrote of the great expansion of Puccini’s musical and dramatic horizons; they commented on his greater maturity of style and praised the splendor of his

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548. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 189.

549. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 278.

550. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 215.

551. *Ibid.*, 209-10.

orchestration.”<sup>552</sup> It took longer for the public in England and America to warm to this new opera but eventually it became very popular all over the world.<sup>553</sup>

Ashbrook states that for “most people, the role of Liù is the most immediately appealing and effective in the opera...both her text and music are triumphs of understatement.”<sup>554</sup> “Liù...is the final expression of a Puccinian ideal: the humble, unselfish, loyal, submissive, but (when challenged) courageous love.”<sup>555</sup> Puccini was already almost two years into the process of composing *Turandot* when it occurred to him that Liù must be sacrificed in order for Turandot’s heart to be softened.<sup>556</sup> Liù, just a mere servant, is the one character who shows Turandot what real love looks like.

“Signore, ascolta” is Liù’s first aria and lasts a little over two minutes. Within this two minutes, she must emote, sing completely legato, and have a strong high Bb at the end that can be floated.<sup>557</sup> The role is most appropriate for a lyric or *Lirico-spinto* voice. According to Singher, the singer must have a “brilliant voice” that contains luminous high notes.<sup>558</sup> “Tu, che di gel” is Liù’s final aria, compounding her willingness to die even though she is being tortured to reveal Calaf’s name. “The last six notes are as

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552. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 211.

553. *Ibid.*, 211-12.

554. *Ibid.*, 214.

555. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds. *The Puccini Companion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 121.

556. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 206.

557. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 214.

558. *Ibid.*

desperate a cry as has ever been written in opera. Note that all of them are elongated, not accented, by stresses and fermatas and that a soaring spin must take the voice to the B-flat in a superb legato.”<sup>559</sup>

Turandot is a role that requires a more mature dramatic soprano voice. The role is on the same level as Isolde and Brünnhilde, even though the role of Turandot is much shorter. Puccini’s early thoughts of her character lead him to say it was necessary “to exalt the amorous passion of Turandot, who for such a long time has suffocated beneath the ashes of her great pride.”<sup>560</sup> Even when she is not on stage, Turandot’s power is ever-present, affecting every encounter and situation taking place. Puccini preferred Jeritza as the soprano to debut the role of Turandot and it was well-known that in her prime, Jeritza’s voice was “practically indefatigable in the upper fifth of its range.”<sup>561</sup> This high tessitura is present from Turandot’s opening aria, “In questa reggia” all the way through the role. Nilsson said, “Turandot is known as a real voice-killer in the opera repertoire.”<sup>562</sup>

#### Richard Strauss 1864-1949

Richard Strauss is also one of the most well-known German composers after Wagner, who spanned the twentieth century. His operas are very popular and still performed regularly all over the world. Within his writings, we have operas, instrumental

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559. Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 216.

560. William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 199.

561. *Ibid.*, 217.

562. Birgit Nilsson, *La Nilsson: My Life in Opera*, trans. Doris Jung Popper (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 89.

music, songs, and symphonic poems. Strauss also frequently conducted his works as well as the works of others.<sup>563</sup> Strauss drew inspiration from Wagner and Liszt which allowed his style to develop from its conservative beginnings.<sup>564</sup> “He proved to be the most vital and successful of the successors of Wagner. His operatic methods were based on those of his exemplar, his harmonies, naturally, as he developed, growing more ‘modern’ and individual, and his orchestration (which is masterly) more personal.”<sup>565</sup>

Above all else, Strauss “wanted his audiences to understand his music.”<sup>566</sup> In reference to his compositional process, he would often begin with a two or four measure phrase or idea then expand it into larger sections of as much as thirty-two measures.<sup>567</sup> His melodic lines and the harmonic function of the music was the most essential part to the process.<sup>568</sup> His process was very organized as he used sketchbooks to write down his musical ideas just as Beethoven had done.<sup>569</sup> In regards to his operatic compositions, he “began thinking about the music of an opera as soon as he knew the subject matter or plot. Keys, motives, and perhaps also themes were drafted before he had read a line of the text.”<sup>570</sup>

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563. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 990.

564. Ibid.

565. Ibid., 989.

566. Charles Youmans, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22.

567. Ibid., 23.

568. Ibid.

569. Ibid., 27.

570. Ibid., 40.

It was during the time of composing *Elektra* that Strauss proposed his vocal writing style. He said:

“I was beginning to realize at that time how fundamentally my vocal style differs even from that of Wagner. My vocal style has the pace of a stage play and frequently comes into conflict with the figuring and polyphony of the orchestra, so that none but the best conductors, who themselves know something of singing, can establish the balance of volume and speed between singer and baton. The struggle between word and music has been the problem of my life right from the beginning, which *Capriccio* solves with a question mark.”<sup>571</sup>

### *Elektra*

*Elektra* is a tragedy in one act approximately one hour and forty-five minutes in length and was composed from 1906-08.

“One of the attractions for Strauss of Hofmannsthal’s play, along with the opportunities it offered for characterization (especially the contrasts between the three principal women), was ‘the tremendous increase in musical tension to the very end’, the famous *crescendo* effect which sometimes gives the impression that *Elektra* consists of one climax after another.”<sup>572</sup>

“Here is a drama whose solitary motive is revenge, a drama containing no love interest, no light relief – nothing but an hour and three-quarters of black hate.”<sup>573</sup> *Elektra* is

“generally considered to be Strauss’s most modern work, an Expressionist extravaganza from the destructive consequences of which he was gradually to retreat.”<sup>574</sup> Osborne classifies *Elektra* as “one of the most remarkable operas of the twentieth century, and

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571. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 57.

572. Derrick Puffett, ed. *Richard Strauss: Elektra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35-6.

573. J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Favourite Operas: From Mozart to Mascagni* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1910), 287.

574. Derrick Puffett, ed. *Richard Strauss: Elektra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 74.

Strauss's most Wagnerian in its ability to communicate on more than one level of consciousness."<sup>575</sup>

Chrysothemis is Elektra's younger, more naïve, and often considered weaker, sister. Mann describes her as "the only remotely sex-appealing character in *Elektra*..."<sup>576</sup> "Ich hab's wie Feuer in der Brust," Chrysothemis's opening aria, requires a great deal of stamina and dramatic prowess. Chrysothemis has grown weary of Elektra's revenge plot and leaves the palace to explore love and experience being a mother. The aria is "absolutely characteristic of an uncontrolled animal longing for freedom, marriage, children—all withheld through Elektra's stubborn antagonism to their ruler-guardians."<sup>577</sup> "The music which Strauss has given Chrysothemis is in effective contrast with that of Elektra, lighter and more lyrical in expression. But it is a generalized expression: Strauss has not been able to give this less strong character the individuality with which he has so memorably characterized Elektra."<sup>578</sup>

"In Greek mythology, the daughter of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra who avenges the murder of her father is Elektra."<sup>579</sup> Elektra is "resolute, selfless, and virtually ritualistic in her single-minded quest for vindication."<sup>580</sup> "Elektra's words – 'the music

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575. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 71.

576. William Mann, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Study of the Operas* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1964), 74.

577. *Ibid.*, 82.

578. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 66.

579. *Ibid.*, 60.

580. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 127.



comes from me' – confirm her status as true hero and protagonist of the opera..."<sup>581</sup> In short, "Elektra mourns the death of her father Agamemnon, who was murdered by her mother, Klytemnestra, and tries to persuade her sister Chrysothemis to help her avenge his death. Their brother Orestes, whom they had believed dead, returns home and kills both Klytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus."<sup>582</sup>

When asked what role has changed her life up to this point, Christine Goerke said:

"Elektra. Hands down. I was singing Chrysothemis happily for years, and had a few more contracts on the books for it. I had decided that if I took on Elektra, I would wait until I was at least 45 years old. (Why that number? No idea. Just sounded right.) A call came when I was 40. "We want you to change roles. Would you please sing the title role instead?" I said, "I'm sorry, it's just far too soon for that, and I feel that I sing Chrysothemis very well." "Well, you do! But the problem is if you're singing Chrysothemis, who is going to sing Elektra?" I said, "I don't know but that's not my problem." "Actually, it is. We can't cast you as Chrysothemis anymore. So, it's time to step up or sit down for a while." I would have been 42 when I sang it for the first time. I shot an e-mail to Deborah Polaski. I told her the whole thing. I said I felt like it was too soon, but if she would work with me, I'd do it. She said something brilliant to me the year before. She said that we Americans are far too concerned with numbers. If your voice is supposed to sing a certain repertoire, and the technique is behind it the numbers JUST don't matter. Turns out? She was right and I had done more damage trying to stay in repertoire that was too small for me. I did decide that I would ONLY sing it lyrically, not the way I'd heard people screaming through it. I thought that if people didn't like that then that's fine, but it's my interpretation. The role insisted I learn about how to deal with my stamina and that I examine the orchestral score to know when I had to deliver sound and when I could coast. Then it was about the text more than the volume, and that no matter how bombastic the orchestration, line and legato has to exist at all times. I am irrationally possessive of that role. She taught me all of the things."<sup>583</sup>

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581. Derrick Puffett, ed. *Richard Strauss: Elektra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 110.

582. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 60.

583. Christine Goerke, e-mail message to author, August 4, 2016.

In “Allein! Weh, ganz allein!,” Elektra tells the story of her father’s murder by Klytemnestra and Aegisthus. In her father’s name she declares revenge against Klytemnestra. The plan is to conspire with her siblings, Chrysothemis and Orestes, to murder their mother and her lover and to dance around their dead bodies. The sheer length of this dramatic monologue extends to approximately nine and a half minutes. While Elektra “addresses the spirit of Agamemnon,...the Agamemnon motif continually recurs in her vocal line and in the orchestra as she evokes her dead father...The dance is heard in the orchestra, but it is not yet performed by Elektra, merely envisaged and eagerly anticipated.”<sup>584</sup>

Elektra sings “Wie stark du bist” after learning her brother, Orestes, is dead. Elektra desperately tries to recruit Chrysothemis to help her kill their mother. Elektra uses flattery to manipulate Chrysothemis to help but Chrysothemis refuses. This monologue is shorter at just over two minutes with a swiftly moving tempo. The tessitura is high with many leaps and constant chromaticism. The music perfectly paints the dramatic text and desperation of Elektra.

“Orest! Orest! Orest!” is Elektra’s joyful cry as she reunites with Orestes after believing him to be dead. She refuses his embrace claiming she is dirty and no longer beautiful. Now that her brother has returned, she knows her revenge is drawing near. When Strauss received the verses for this section from his librettist, Hofmannsthal, he said, “Your verses when Elektra recognizes Orestes are marvellous [*sic*] and already set to music. You are the born librettist—the greatest compliment, to my mind, since I

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584. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 65.

consider it much more difficult to write a good operatic text than a fine play.”<sup>585</sup> This narrative in which Elektra’s “madness and savagery drained from her in a great access of love for her brother” is about ten minutes and begins to draw the opera to a close.<sup>586</sup> It is obvious from the role length, dramatic elements, and Elektra’s presence on stage for most of the opera that this role is one of the most difficult in the repertoire. Comparable to Wagner’s Isolde, Elektra is also a role most appropriate for the most mature dramatic soprano.

### *Der Rosenkavalier*

*Der Rosenkavalier* is a comedy for music in three acts approximately three hours and fifteen minutes in length and was composed from 1909-10. This opera “was to prove the most popular by far of the works on which Strauss and Hofmannsthal collaborated, and it has come to be regarded as the most Viennese of operas...”<sup>587</sup> Holden writes that “...Strauss’s music is post-Wagnerian in its subtle symphonic development of leitmotifs and its use of the orchestra in a richly allusive fashion. The score is both heavy and light, and the vocal writing carries a stage further Strauss’s development of a lyrical conversational style that is neither aria nor recitative.”<sup>588</sup>

The Marschallin “is a woman well versed in the pleasures of love. Married off to her Field Marshal at a rather tender age, she had to wait for illicit affairs of the heart in

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585. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 61.

586. *Ibid.*, 69.

587. *Ibid.*, 77.

588. Amanda Holden, ed. *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 428.

order to discover the joys utterly lacking in her marriage.”<sup>589</sup> Strauss specifically said that the Marshallin “must be a beautiful young woman of not more than thirty-two years of age, who in a bad mood thinks of herself as an ‘old woman’ by comparison with the seventeen-year-old Octavian...”<sup>590</sup> Lotte Lehmann, a celebrated soprano in many of Strauss’s lead roles, described her as “a soldier’s wife. Knightless, imperturbability, eagerness for adventure course through her blood.”<sup>591</sup> Jefferson considers the Marschallin to be “the most real and memorable character” in the entire opera.<sup>592</sup> The role of the Marschallin is typically cast with a *spinto* voice. “Da geht er hin,” is a narrative bemoaning the aging signs on her face while she studies herself in a mirror. This causes her to worry about growing older. “Composed in Strauss’s conversational, quasi-arioso style of melodic recitative, this contemplative aria is both moving and memorable.”<sup>593</sup> The aria is completely in the middle voice with brief leaps to the upper *passaggio*.

### *Ariadne auf Naxos*

*Ariadne auf Naxos* is an opera in one act with a prologue approximately two hours in length and was composed from 1911-12 with a second version in 1916. The second version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* is the one with which current audiences are familiar. The opera is best described as a play within a play. Over time and revisions, *Ariadne* grew

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589. Lotte Lehmann, *Five Operas and Richard Strauss*, trans. Ernst Pawel. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 124.

590. Alan Jefferson, *Richard Strauss: Der Rosenkavalier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 24.

591. *Ibid.*, 27.

592. *Ibid.*, 78.

593. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 83.

from a half hour Intermezzo to a two-hour opera.<sup>594</sup> Osborne asserts that “by no means the finest of the operas which Strauss wrote with Hofmannsthal, *Ariadne auf Naxos* is still an attractive, if uneven work.”<sup>595</sup>

Ariadne is a Greek mythical character and is the daughter of Minos, King of Crete. Lotte Lehmann describes her as “beautiful, young, and lovable...”<sup>596</sup> “Ariadne fell in love with an Athenian youth, Theseus, and helped him slay the Minotaur and escape with her. On their voyage to Athens they landed on the island of Naxos where Theseus, for reasons of his own, abandoned her.”<sup>597</sup> Originally, Strauss intended for Zerbinetta to be the star role as a coloratura soprano with Ariadne as a contralto.<sup>598</sup> Keeping Zerbinetta’s characteristics, Strauss wrote Ariadne for a dramatic soprano. Ariadne’s music “has both charm and a certain nobility, contrasting well with Zerbinetta’s cheerful vulgarity.”<sup>599</sup>

In “Es gibt ein Reich,” Ariadne is lamenting her loss of Theseus. She elaborately describes the land of death where she will go to rid herself of this pain. She looks forward to death believing she will find a land full of everything she was denied in her life. This

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594. William Mann, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Study of the Operas* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1964), 163-4.

595. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 107.

596. Lotte Lehmann, *Five Operas and Richard Strauss*, trans. Ernst Pawel. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 4.

597. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 105.

598. *Ibid.*, 94.

599. *Ibid.*, 107.

beautiful aria “begins solemnly, progressing to an ecstatic climax as Ariadne begs Hermes to take this burdensome life from her. The aria falls to a graceful close from the soprano’s high B flat.”<sup>600</sup> The aria is comprised of chromatic melodic lines, tempo shifts, and an abundance of register shifts.

*Die Frau ohne Schatten*

*Die Frau ohne Schatten* is an opera in three acts approximately three hours and thirty minutes in length and was composed from 1914-17. The librettist, Hofmannsthal, explained that the opera “would veer between the world of spirits and the world of humans with an intermediate plane inhabited by the Emperor and Empress.”<sup>601</sup> The “basis to the plot is that marriage not blessed by children cannot offer perfect happiness.”<sup>602</sup> Even though the plot is fancied and difficult to follow, “the music is indescribably beautiful. It speaks a language all its own, simply overwhelming, and really requires no help from any medium other than itself.”<sup>603</sup> “Although the principal subject of the opera is infertility – the ‘shadow’ is the symbol of parenthood – its main dramatic interest is in the Empress’s development from a fairy-tale creature into a human being through her realization that other people matter.”<sup>604</sup> Musically, Strauss “weaves into his

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600. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 106.

601. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 431.

602. Lotte Lehmann, *Five Operas and Richard Strauss*, trans. Ernst Pawel. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 31-2.

603. *Ibid.*, 63.

604. Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 9th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 431.

orchestral texture the numerous themes, melodic fragments or phrases, which represent characters or ideas.”<sup>605</sup>

The Empress requires a dramatic soprano who is very comfortable singing in the higher tessitura. Her opening aria, “Is mein Liebster dahin,” is very dramatic, demanding many melodic leaps, trills, and a high D6. In this aria, the Empress is reminiscing about her ability to transform into any creature she desires. The entire role demands a “superb actress to highlight the role in such a way as to indicate its crucial importance right from the very beginning, when the Empress actually has very little singing to do, but must be able to move the audience by the sheer force of her acting.”<sup>606</sup>

Lotte Lehmann describes the Nurse as a “demonic hag of great importance to the story.”<sup>607</sup> For Astrid Varnay, the role of the Nurse was one of the most difficult she encountered in her career. The difficulty came with the challenging chord progressions therefore requiring a thorough study of the harmonic progressions during the learning process.<sup>608</sup> “The ambiguous character of the Nurse, whose sympathies are inconstant and who has contact with bold worlds, is accompanied by solo obbligato instruments.”<sup>609</sup>

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605. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 115.

606. Lotte Lehmann, *Five Operas and Richard Strauss*, trans. Ernst Pawel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 59.

607. *Ibid.*, 32.

608. Astrid Varnay, *Fifty-five Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 252.

609. Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988), 123.

Even though the Nurse is typically cast with a dramatic mezzo-soprano, the singer must have accessible power above the staff.

The Dyer's wife is the female role in this opera most often sung by dramatic sopranos. Lotte Lehmann, the first Dyer's wife chosen specifically by Strauss, called the role "truly forbidding and vocally exhausting..."<sup>610</sup> She is in almost every scene of the opera. The Dyer's wife has an extended narrative at the beginning of Act III, "Schweig doch, ihr Stimmen!," lasting approximately eight minutes. In this narrative, she is alone, haunted by the Voices of the Unborn Children.

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610. Lotte Lehmann, *Five Operas and Richard Strauss*, trans. Ernst Pawel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 25.



## APPENDIX C - IRB Approval Letter



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | [www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board)

### NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 16042001  
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Pedagogical Challenges Related to the Training of a Dramatic Soprano  
PROJECT TYPE: New Project  
RESEARCHER(S): Amber James  
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters  
DEPARTMENT: School of Music  
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A  
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval  
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 05/10/2016 to 05/09/2017  
**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**  
**Institutional Review Board**

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