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Journal of Singing, May/June 2007
Volume 63, No. 5, pp. 513-521
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National Association of Teachers of Singing

THE *JOURNAL OF SINGING* PERIODICALLY publishes selected pronouncements issued by the American Academy of Teachers of Singing. For a brief history of the organization and its unique relationship to NATS, the reader is referred to *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 3 (January/February 2005). Since 1922, the year of its founding, the Academy has been actively writing and disseminating papers on all subjects pertaining to the teaching of singing.

The present paper differs from the usual Statements arising out of the Academy in that it came about in response to some questions from the Douglas Moore Foundation concerning the lack of resources available to composers who write for the voice. This response is intended principally for composers-in-training who wish to learn more about how singers choose and learn contemporary music and how teachers teach it. At the same time, the paper may inform singers and voice pedagogues regarding challenges inherent in composing and performing contemporary music for voice.

Because position papers arise out of the Academy as a whole rather than reflect the thinking of an individual or small group, it is important to list the organization's membership at the time of the drafting of a particular document. Its appearance in the *Journal of Singing*, however, does not imply NATS endorsement, nor does its content necessarily reflect the philosophy of NATS or this publication. Readers are invited to visit the AATS website [www.voiceteachersacademy.org].

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR THE COMPOSITION OF VOCAL MUSIC

A Paper by the American Academy of Teachers of Singing

INTRODUCTION

A composer writes music because he or she cannot do otherwise. A person possessing the gift of musical creativity must exercise it. The melodies, rhythms, harmonies, tone colors, and structures within the creative brain must be released and organized into forms that will enable the artistic idea to be recreated and shared with the population as a whole. No one has a right, nor should want to interfere in this indefinable, magical process. Creativity, however, is not the only factor in the successful process of musical composition. Any composer would admit to the need for developing the *skills* of composition—skills based upon the musical theories derived from centuries of prior composition, skills based upon a complete working knowledge of musical instruments, skills based upon an understanding of physical stamina and the performing process.

Singing is one of the great natural forms of musical expression exhibited in virtually all the cultures of mankind. Because it is derived from the natural inflections of speech, singing is a musical common denominator. As such,

the process by which musical sounds emerge from the singing voice is often taken for granted. It often is assumed that, since anyone can sing, anyone can write music for the voice. The American Academy of Teachers of Singing sees singing as a trained art. It recognizes the skills needed by a singer to maximize the expressive intentions of the composer, and to nurture and protect the vocal instrument itself. We, as professional singing teachers, embrace dialogue and interaction with composers and those who teach composition. As singers, many of us premiered a significant number of contemporary vocal works in major opera houses and concert venues nationally and internationally. We know how singers sing, and how they learn. In this document we simply offer our observations, based upon years of collective experience, about those factors that work well for the voice and those that do not. We intend no dictatorial directives, but simply offer these guidelines for whatever value they may be with the hope that the art of vocal composition in some small ways may be enhanced as a result.

To elicit opinions from the members of the Academy, who live and work throughout the United States, we developed a questionnaire focusing on those elements of vocal composition about which we felt composers might enjoy knowing our thoughts. While the survey concentrates on classical contemporary vocal music, many of the observations would apply to popular music as well. The body of this document represents a compilation of the responses from the questionnaire.

QUESTIONNAIRE

I. If a composer sought your feedback on how to write for the voice with maximum effectiveness and minimal vocal strain, how would you address the following issues?

A. Melody.

1. Range.

Most well trained singers vocalize comfortably within a range of two octaves. Each voice type (soprano, mezzo soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, bass, plus their sub-categories—coloratura, lyric, spinto, dramatic, etc.) is range specific. The composer should be well acquainted with these range parameters, as well as the areas within

the parameters where the voice will sound best or can most effectively create the colors the composer desires. Very low or very high notes make articulation more difficult, so if words are involved—as opposed to vowels alone or vocal sound effects—intelligibility will suffer. This is particularly true if the tempo is fast. A melody that is extreme in range, jumping from very low to very high (or the opposite) affects breath management, resonance shaping, and other production issues. In order to be handled smoothly, this requires more effort from the singer and carries a greater possibility of vocal fatigue. Concurrently, most singers favor a liberal use of the entire range, rather than a clumping of phrases within a single sector. Expression of the text will be most easily achieved when the range of vocal music approximates the range of the speaking voice. Extremes of range may be employed in moments of heightened emotional intensity, but one should not write *whole compositions* in extremes of vocal range. In short, range should not be used as an end in itself, but should serve the expressive suggestions of the text. A composer should know all the traditionally accepted singing *Fachs*, with the normal range and comfort zone of each. Particular care should be taken to understand the difference between those *Fachs* that are close to each other, such as lyric soprano and spinto soprano, high baritone and tenor. Even within comfort zones, factors such as prolonged high volume, repeated notes, long note values, etc., can affect vocal efficiency. Finally, while writing within a specific range for a specific singer might maximize the composer's expressive possibilities, most composers desire multiple performances of any given composition. In general, the greater the range and the more extreme the pitch motion, the smaller the number of singers who will be available to sing the music.

2. Tessitura.

Tessitura is defined as the pitch area in which the majority of the melodic tones of a composition lie. A composition can have both extreme high notes and extreme low notes, but if the majority of the notes are in the upper area of pitch range, the composition is defined as one with a high *tessitura*. In many respects, *tessitura* is even more important to a singer than pitch range. Composers must understand that singers cannot sustain extreme *tessitura* passages for extended peri-

ods. Excursions into the highest notes of the voice may be effective because they stand out from the rest of the texture. If the entire composition is in a high *tessitura*, nothing is accented and the audience has greater difficulty understanding the text. Long passages in either a very high or very low *tessitura*, or centered in a singer's *passaggio*, can be very fatiguing to singers, even those with the best technique. Extended sequential passages on rising pitches are particularly difficult. In general, maintaining accurate pitch, beauty of tone and intelligibility of text all will be negatively affected. Again, the composer should know the comfort zone for each *Fach* of the voice. For example, lyric sopranos might tolerate slightly longer passages in the *passaggio* and above, while dramatic sopranos would fade. Ultimately, a melody that is balanced between low and high, between sustained and shorter notes, using a variety of dynamics and with an awareness of tempo, makes for the greatest ease for the singer and the best chance for the success of the music being sung. The aesthetic of 21st century music may make demands beyond this, but the composer should be aware of what is natural or "supernatural" and be sure that the vocal muscles are allowed their release. A composer should have a clear image of what type of voice he/she would like to use for a specific song (much depends on the text). A comfortable *tessitura* is essential. A song or aria that spends 30% of its time in 20% of a singer's range will be difficult to sustain.

3. Interval relationships; disjunct intervals, e.g., major 7ths, augmented 4ths, 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, etc.

Composers should understand that disjunct intervals, for example, augmented 4ths, major 7ths, 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and the like, are difficult for singers to tune accurately, unless they possess absolute pitch. Most singers do not. Also, rapid changes in these intervals will add another level of difficulty to the composition. Most singers dislike music that treats the voice as though it were a fingered or stopped instrument. However, most singers are also more than willing to undertake the additional musical and vocal work demanded by disjunct intervals as long as some interpretive underpinning makes sense of the leap. If the composer hears disjunct intervals in the expression of the poem, then they must be written, but the com-

poser must understand that a more advanced level singer will be required to sing them. When disjunct intervals are required, singers can incorporate them into their vocalizing. Many voice teachers already do this as standard procedure, noting that Mozart wrote very large intervals for the voice and negotiating these can actually be helpful to finding and maintaining vocal balance. The Academy points out that the difficulty of disjunct intervals is considerably lessened if those intervals are thoroughly grounded in the underlying harmonic structure of the composition.

4. Octave displacement.

Academy members find little problem with octave displacement, except for some additional attention to tuning. This may be more a question of musicianship than vocalism and will depend to some degree on the logical direction of the melodic line.

5. Melodic sweep or direction: Do you prefer a downward pitch motion before a climactic high note? Do you prefer a continuous upward pitch motion before a climactic high note?

The Academy finds both of these approaches acceptable with the qualification that continuous upward motion in small intervals can be vocally fatiguing, particularly when it is in the *passaggio* and with a slow tempo or long note values. Most Academy members prefer a skip of some sort before a high note. Some prefer a downward pitch motion, but warn that very little vocal weight should be put on the downward motion. The implication for the composer is that important words should not be set in a downward motion directly before a climactic high note. All members agree that long sustained phrases that are progressively *louder* in close interval upward pitch direction are the most difficult.

6. Phrase lengths in relation to breathing.

Clearly, phrase lengths depend on the text, and composers should expect a trained singer to have a reasonable mastery of breath control. However, the composer must allow adequate time for breathing, for the preparation for demanding phrases, and for adequate breathing space between strung out sentences. In writing a long phrase, if it is too much for the singer to complete

it as a full thought, the composer must think in clauses—as parts of a sentence. Normal phrases seldom extend beyond ten second segments. Vocal phrase length is also contingent on the number and configuration of open and closed vowels and consonants—particularly sibilants and plosives that require more breath for projection. If the composer is looking for wide accessibility, it would be wise not to depend on the probability that all singers have the natural ability or the highly developed technique to sing endless phrases. In addition to breathing at punctuation marks, a singer can usually take an unobtrusive breath before a prepositional phrase, conditional subphrase, or conjunction. The composer can take this into consideration by having these breathing places occur before pick-up notes, or before the weak beats of a measure rather than before a downbeat.

7. Pitch onset—related to breathing: Do you prefer a break and a breath before a high note (reattack)? Do you prefer no breath before a high note?

Academy members are more or less evenly divided on this issue, with a slight edge for a break among male singers, and a slight preference for carrying over for female singers. The implication for the composer, particularly if the song is not gender specific, is to set the text so that either approach is possible. In other words, the composer should avoid a leap within a single word or between two strong word forms, or should avoid a situation that *demand absolute continuity* in approaching the high note, or *absolutely requires* a breath before a high note. A breath sensitive setting of the phrases preceding the high note phrase would be desirable for either of the above approaches.

B. Rhythm.

The Academy is in complete agreement that a composer should be free to challenge a singer with difficult rhythms. The better the singer, the more challenging the literature can be. However, all aspects of rhythm should be in service to the expression of the text, and complicated patterns should not be ends in themselves. Also, composers should remember that singers are expected to memorize their music—in opera, recital, and sometimes even in chamber music—to maximize facial expression and text communication to the audi-

ence. Extremely complex rhythms certainly make the memorization process more difficult.

1. Metric vs. nonmetric.

Singers should be able to handle both without restricting the composer. If the text rhythm is metric it makes more sense for the musical rhythm to be metric, but this should not be a requirement of a nonmetric text. The composer should remember that metric music is generally easier for a singer to learn and memorize. If many of the other elements of a song or aria are difficult, a nonmetric rhythm may encourage a singer to bypass it, or may never allow the singer to get beyond the intellectual focus of getting through the piece.

2. Changing meters.

The Academy finds changing meters intellectually challenging and offering much in the way of interest and text enhancement when they are part of an overall continuity and make sense with the rhythm of the words. The only warning would be as in that with metric and nonmetric rhythms. Changing meters coupled with other highly difficult elements reduce the accessibility of the song to less musically skilled singers.

3. Text rhythms vs. musical rhythms.

One would assume that the voice was chosen as the instrument for the music in question because the composer was inspired by the words. If that is so, the rhythm of the words must play a strong part in the decisions made by the composer. It can be interesting on occasion to have a bit of conflict between the natural rhythm of the words and the rhythms of the music, but in general the natural rhythm of the words should be a significant factor in the composition of the music. When musical rhythms are created to reflect the text rhythms everything is simpler, leading to greater artistic communication of the stresses and nonstresses of the text and better comprehension on the part of the audience.

4. Syncopation.

The Academy finds syncopation an interesting musical device, potentially text enhancing, which provides no particular vocal problem unless the placement of the syncopation within the phrase requires an awkward breath.

C. Harmony.

1. Tonal vs. atonal.

Most singers do not have absolute pitch. Most singers, like members of the general population, are exposed on an everyday basis primarily to tonal music—television, radio, commercials, and traditional musical training. Most singers think tonally. However, much poetry and many dramatic situations have been set with stunning effect by composers writing exclusively or partially in an atonal system. If created within the boundaries previously discussed for range, *tessitura*, phrase lengths, etc., atonal music should not be more innately difficult *vocally* than tonal music. However, the process for learning atonal music for the vast majority of singers is longer and carries a potential for vocal fatigue. A singer must learn not to “feel out” the pitch with the throat. A composer of atonal music needs to select his singers carefully and to be very patient in the rehearsal process. When an atonal setting fully expresses the intention of the text, few accomplished singers will refuse to put in the time needed to learn it. Less accomplished singers will probably avoid it, and voice teachers should not be censured for discouraging such effort by students who might be harmed in the learning process.

2. Need for melodic tone to be found in the supporting harmony (percentage?).

Obviously, if the melodic tone is found in the supporting harmony one hundred percent of the time, learning a song or aria is much easier. This is certainly not likely to happen in most modern music, nor should a composer feel required to do it. Most Academy members prefer twenty-five to fifty percent of the melodic tones to be found in the supporting harmony. A few members do not feel the need for *any* melodic tones to be found in the supporting harmony. No member required or even professed a liking for melodic *doubling*. The general consensus: while the melodic tone does not need actually to appear in the supporting harmony at all times, not to have *any* relationship whatsoever between the preceding and supporting harmonies should not happen very often. The preceding harmonies of the accompaniment could as well *lead* to the coming melodic tone, making it inevitable; or the melodic tone

could be part of the *preceding* chord even though it is not a part of the chord actually supporting the melodic tone. In other words, a melodic tone should have a recognizable function that makes sense for it to be there. When the melodic tone is totally arbitrary and the singer does not have absolute pitch, it is exceedingly difficult to find it.

3. Contrapuntal vs. chordal accompaniment.

The Academy finds contrapuntal accompaniments generally a little more challenging than chordal accompaniments, but does not find them inappropriate or vocally troublesome for a well schooled musician. A composer should feel free to use either, and many Academy members felt that the contrapuntal, while more challenging, is actually more interesting. For a severely atonal melodic line, a chordal accompaniment is preferred.

D. Timbre.

1. Vowels—vowel selection with regard to pitch: Are there specific vowels that cause more difficulty than others?

Entire books have been written regarding vowel selection and pitch (see Berton Coffin, *Overtones of Bel Canto* and Barbara Doscher, *Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*). With regard to the ease of singing the highest pitches of a singer's range, Academy members reflect a diversity of opinion. Some find no difference in the vowel selection. Some find back vowels more difficult. A slight majority find closed, front, or narrow vowels to be more difficult. All Academy members recognize the individuality of the singer's voice type and gender in how they approach vowel production in the extremes of range. There is total Academy agreement that vowels will naturally modify somewhat or will be deliberately modified as singers approach the higher (and sometimes lower) extremes of the range. For example, when a soprano's sung pitch lies above the first formant of a vowel, that vowel will be less clear and she can not help it, except by tuning to the second formant which modifies the vowel further. The composer just might be able to choose a better vowel for that pitch to gain a more understandable text. The essential issue for the composer is text intelligibility. The modifi-

cation of a vowel from closed to open (e.g., “peach,” “pitch”) or open to closed can completely change the meaning of the word. If the word on the high note is totally vowel dependent for intelligibility, the composer may not get the clarity he desires. Some singers will avoid music that makes such demands; some will attempt accurate pronunciation with concurrent vocal risks. Working closely with singers and studying the newest voice science research (there is now scientific information to verify what Handel, Mozart, and Verdi knew by experience) is essential for a composer who wishes to fully grasp the problems and possibilities of this issue.

2. Consonants—consonant selection with regard to pitch: Are there any specific consonants that cause more difficulty than others?

Opinions vary on this issue also, although a majority of Academy members feel that consonants formed in the back of the mouth, or words containing consonant clusters are slightly more difficult to produce. All are in agreement that this is largely an issue of technique and there are many technical devices—such as interchanging voiced and unvoiced consonants, or anticipating a consonant in advance of a pitch leap—that can make consonant articulation easier and still accurate. The composer must understand the time factor. A word or syllable with several consonants, or consonants requiring a guttural or plosive articulation, will usually take slightly more time and should be set with a properly corresponding note value.

3. How do you feel about vocal “sound effects,” e.g., clicks, glottals, pops, grunts, whistles, etc.? Are any particularly harmful?

If composed in service to the expression of the text, the Academy has no general objection to vocal sound effects. For example, clicks, such as those found in some African folk songs, can be a natural part of the spoken language. However, any sound effects that require a grating of the vocal folds, repeated glottals, unsupported shrieking or screaming, should be totally avoided or extremely limited in use. Most vocal “sound effects,” particularly if produced in the mouth (lip trills, pops) or with breath, can be produced in a healthy manner with analysis and practice. Composers

should be prepared to devise or accept an appropriate alternative sound if a singer finds the production of the original sound harmful.

E. Texture.

1. Density of accompaniment.

While a dense accompaniment (piano or orchestral) may heighten the emotional power of the music, it often works against the expressivity of the singer and the intelligibility of the text. This is, of course, range and voice type dependent; for example, an overly dense accompaniment in the lower ranges of the soprano voice can totally obscure the singer. Density of accompaniment is a particular problem if the singer’s line is buried in the sound. This is particularly true if the accompaniment falls in the same range as the voice. (In Mozart’s beautifully written “O Isis und Osiris” from *Die Zauberflöte* we find a bass singer in a relatively low part of the voice singing with an accompaniment composed entirely of instruments playing an octave higher than the voice and an octave lower than the voice. No instruments are playing in the same octave as the singer. Projection, then, is achieved much more easily.) Although many later composers did double the voice to add emotional power to the music, the doubling can make it harder for the singers to cut through. Only singers with naturally strong voices can be heard over these accompaniments. Density can be lessened if the accompaniment has movement. Density of accompaniment will always be a principal factor in a composer’s or conductor’s choice of a singer for a particular work, and it must be an element taken into consideration in a singer’s decision to undertake a particular work.

2. Percussive vs. legato keyboard accompaniment.

Either accompaniment style is acceptable when appropriate and effective in support of the text. The voice at its best is a legato instrument; therefore legato figures in the accompaniment are more compatible. Singers tend to imitate the accompaniments with which they work. A percussive accompaniment can encourage a percussive voice use, unless the singer is trained to counteract this. Some of the best performances are accomplished when the singer sings legato in direct contrast to a percussive and very rhythmic accompani-

ment (e.g., Toreador Song from *Carmen*). Both percussive and legato keyboard articulation can be engaging and nonproblematic; either can contribute to excessive density with similar results on the voice. The singer must be able to meet the variables.

3. Vocal line doubling (by keyboard and/or other instruments).

The Academy is in close agreement on this issue. If the doubling is used sparingly to improve the meaning or character of the song, it is tolerable; however, doubling the vocal line, especially at the same pitch, usually creates competition rather than support. Vocal doubling demands strong sounds from the singer and requires that the singer find a strong singer's formant. Male singers, in particular, will be lost in a doubled orchestral texture. Often, vocal doubling creates an ensemble problem and requires special sensitivity on the part of the accompanist or conductor. With a beginning singer, vocal doubling can be helpful musically, but not vocally. In any use of vocal doubling, a composer should take extraordinary care with the choice of instruments and assigned dynamics.

4. Text setting.

Vocal music exists because the combination of the abstract art of music and the more specific art of poetry produces an art that moves people in a very special way. This means that the text must be regarded with respect and should come from the best literary sources. Most singers select a work by whether they like the text, whether it says something to them, and whether the music directly enhances it.

Although *singing* words is clearly a departure from the expression of everyday life, it should still seem as if it is only an extension of speech—or heightened speech. Most singers want to tell the story in the simplest and most direct way. Text repetition can be employed for certain musical and interpretive purposes, particularly if the text is repeated in the original poem. People *do* repeat things for purposes of emphasis and because they feel that one iteration of the text is insufficient to vent the intense emotions they are experiencing. However, text repetition without emotional validity can become tedious and should not be used just for novelty. Devices such as text splitting, rhythmic dis-

tortion of the natural flow of the language, may have occasional musical validity, but make an effective, communicative *vocal* performance more difficult. This is particularly true if the text is broken arbitrarily into phonemes. Such devices turn vocal music into instrumental music that is played on the voice. An abstract text, of course, will tolerate a greater variety of musical distortion and can thus be treated more subjectively by the singer.

APPENDIX

Observations on the Learning and Teaching of Contemporary Vocal Music

II. When you are learning a contemporary score, or are teaching a contemporary score, do you have specific techniques to lessen vocal strain?

Singers learn music differently than other musicians. They look at the printed score; they must hear the pitch configuration with its corresponding rhythm; then they must bring their vocal folds (from learned experience) into the correct physical approximation to reproduce that pitch without the aid of a pushed key or fingered stop. They also must deal with language—which means there is no single timbre, as with violin or oboe, but a variety of timbres depending on the vowel being sung. The vowel is also influenced by and possibly stopped by the enunciation of consonants. And, the final product must produce an intelligibility as clear as that of spoken language. This process is complex, and can be time consuming with the most highly trained singers.

Learning a score is obviously the responsibility of the singer, with whatever help he/she may seek from a voice teacher or coach-pianist. The difficulty or ease of this process, however, and the potential risk of vocal discomfort involved, is often a factor in a singer's choice of repertory and is always a factor in determining the amount of time set aside to learn it. Several questions were put to the members of the Academy on this topic and what follows is a summation or compilation of those thoughts and ideas.

When learning or teaching a contemporary score, there is general consensus among Academy members that the better the music is understood *in toto*, the faster and easier the learning process will be. A thor-

ough analysis of the melodic contour, rhythmic organization, and harmonic underpinning is the first step or among the first steps the singer must undertake. Equally important is to break down the text and get a feeling for the texture of the words in the mouth. Many advise speaking the text as a monologue first and then in the rhythm as set. Thoroughly hearing the melody internally is stressed as a prelude to actual phonation. Transposing a melodic line downward and vocalizing it in a more comfortable *tessitura* or vocalizing it on a single vowel, followed by the vowels only of the text are suggested aids for efficient and safe learning. The more accomplished the musician, the shorter this process will be. No Academy members recommended sight reading a contemporary score without some advanced preparation.

A. Do you teach or learn contemporary music primarily by repetition?

The Academy recognizes the need for repetition as a device for learning a difficult contemporary score. At the same time, all members warn that repetition, in and for itself, is vocally very wearing. There should be as much preparation—rhythmic, harmonic, textual—as possible before actual singing or phonation occurs. And, when repetition is necessary, time limits should be placed on the practicing. Again, the need for superior musicianship is stressed, as well as allowing adequate *time* for the composition to be worked into the muscles of the voice in a healthy fashion.

B. How much and what kind of musical analysis do you do (melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, etc.)?

All of the Academy members surveyed support a full analysis of a song or aria as an essential part of serious study. Some go as far as a numeric chord labeling; most analyze the contour of the vocal line as related to the underlying harmony and look for repetitions and sequences (no matter how well hidden). It is important to find inversions and other reorderings of the vocal line. Rhythmically, finding repetitions or elaborations on the basic rhythmic devices is essential; as is deciphering the nonmetric passages and making personal decisions on how to treat them. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the relationship of the accompaniment to the singing line must be made.

C. How dependent are you on the keyboard?

Academy members are divided on the use of the keyboard in learning a contemporary song or aria. Several members indicate extreme dependency, and others indicate that they work away from the keyboard entirely. For the majority, who do not have absolute pitch, the response indicated that atonal music required some keyboard dependency for finding starting pitches. Once into the phrase they make their own links into its components without dependency. Playing along with a student *constantly* in the learning of contemporary music is not considered a valid device.

D. Do you ever vocalize in the pitch areas, as opposed to always centering on the pitch?

Again, the Academy is divided on this issue. Many indicate that anything other than the accurate pitch would be sloppy musicianship. However, many include *portamenti* and slides as part of general vocal technique and apply these to contemporary music as well. Many singers instinctively micromanage pitch changes with the muscles of the throat, a potentially damaging process. Using sliding exercises puts more emphasis on breath pressure which can *then* lead to pitch change. Some members suggest vocalizing in the opposite direction—going low for a while—to counterbalance staying in a high *tessitura* too long. Some suggest speaking words in the pitch areas, which helps the body to understand what is to be expressed. Doing this may give insight into interpretation that otherwise might not be easily accessed.

E. Do you separate text and music?

The Academy feels that text and music should not be separated when evaluating the worth of a song or selecting it for performance. In learning a song, however, a majority indicate that separating the text and the music—working with the rhythmic structure of the text before placing it into the melodic line—is time efficient and vocally easier. The need for this should be proportionate to the difficulty of the composition and the level of musicianship of the singer.

F. Do you chant text in rhythm—separate from the melodic line?

Almost all Academy members find chanting rhythms helpful, particularly in difficult contemporary music.

It allows concentration to be devoted to a smaller number of elements. Difficult rhythms can be learned and difficult diction problems can be practiced without the added element of disparate pitch. It should be noted, however, that *chanting* a text over and over could be as wearing as *singing* a text over and over. Indeed, some singers sing better than they speak.

G. Do you modify vowels more often in contemporary music than in the music of earlier eras?

The Academy feels that the laws of vocal acoustics do not change significantly for contemporary music. Some teach vowel modification as a general rule in all music; some feel that vowels modify themselves in the search for an easy vocal production. The only reason for more modifying in contemporary music would be if the composer has an instrumental concept of vocal writing. In such cases modification may need to be done to make the composition more singable.

H. Do you consciously alter resonance configurations (excessively bright or dark, etc.) to counteract or be heard above dense instrumental accompaniments?

The Academy feels that good resonance or “ring” (singer’s formant) should be a component of all vocal tone. When there are balance problems with a heavy accompaniment, it is hoped that these can be resolved without major adjustments to a singer’s normal method of singing resonantly. Under extreme conditions some members admit to producing a brighter color, but not to the extent of changing the basic quality of the voice. Deliberate resonance changes for *characterization* or specific *interpretive* vocal color are considered acceptable.

I. Comment on problems of text projection (for intelligibility) in contemporary vocal music.

Unfortunately, text projection is often an issue in contemporary music. If the text is unintelligible to a person who speaks the language fluently because of the way the music is written, then the piece is worthless as *vocal* music. When the writing is more “instrumental” than “vocal,” matters of syllabic stress and articulation are heightened exponentially. This often results from the fact that composers may not have spent

enough time in the presence of singers working with vocal music. Many of the great composers of vocal music in the past were people who worked regularly in opera houses or accompanied singers for recitals of art songs. Those composers knew from their extensive experience which vowels will work on certain pitches and which will not. Many of the great composers exposed text in or near speech range and then repeated the text on higher passages. If difficult texts are written in high *tessituras*, singers may be forced to choose between making the text intelligible and singing freely and beautifully. Sometimes these obstacles can be overcome, but it will require a singer of particular expertise. Composers can and must create music that reflects their own time and aesthetic, but they can incorporate some basic principles of text setting that have worked successfully for composers of vocal music in the past. The vocal tract behaves according to a certain set of parameters. People are not machines and all singers have limits, although they are different for each voice category and each individual singer. Just because a singer cannot execute something does not mean that the singer is not professional, skilled, talented, or willing. It could be the music and the way it is written.

CONCLUSION

The singer, the voice teacher, and the composer all have one essential goal: an effective performance of the vocal composition. Singers are excited to perform works of their own artistic time period. They are especially excited to premiere the works of living composers and to have the close contact with the composer that the preparation of such performances entails. Voice teachers love the challenge of helping singers solve the technical problems presented by contemporary vocal music. The final performance-product, however, is highly dependent on how well the vocal composition is written. Composers who associate regularly with singers, who study the great past composers of vocal music, or who seek advice on vocal production matters will have the greatest potential for achieving the expressive intention of their vocal composition. The suggestions in this paper are offered to help increase the success of the compositional process.