



Voice Foundation
Newsletter Editors

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The Voice

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Interview with Ben Heppner

Interview with Ben Heppner September, 2011 by Martha Howe:

Canadian dramatic tenor Ben Heppner is well known to his audiences for the beauty of his voice along with the great heart, intelligence and superior musicianship he brings to his performances. Joseph Volpe, in his book on running the Met, includes Ben in a short list of artists who 'have the ability to make that ultimate connection with the audience'. Among his colleagues and friends he is also known for his charm, insight, self-deprecating humor, compassion, clarity, and ability to stay grounded. In 2002 he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada, has received the Metropolitan Opera News Award, is a Juno Award recipient and Grammy Award winner. His extensive discography can be found on

www.benheppner.com



Ben Heppner, Tenor

Do you come from a line of singers, are there other singers in your family, or are you a genetic "one off"?

I have one brother and three sisters who would have a career if they had decided to go for it. Amazing voices; my brother would be a dramatic baritone, and we probably have a pants-role mezzo and a dramatic soprano among my sisters. The interesting thing is that there are two parts to my family. There are another four children that my father had with his first wife, then five with his second wife, my mother, and I am the youngest of that group. The first four are not nearly as musical or vocally gifted as the last five, which is

an interesting study in genetics and a bit of nurture. Mom loved singing and we sang everywhere.

What kind of singing did you do as a child and growing up?

As a family, we sang songs that would have been popular a decade or two earlier, and I was always singing with my brothers and sisters. The church was

a big part of it. Although my upbringing was Mennonite, we attended protestant evangelical churches with white gospel and hymn style singing, and I sang a lot with my family, as a soloist, and in the congregation.

When I was three and four years old, we lived in a rural community in Canada quite far from anywhere else, attending a church in Cherry Point. One week my family was on for special music, and after joining the rehearsals at home I was rather annoyed that my father held me back when they all went up to perform. Not allowed to go with

them, I thought, "We do what we have to do!" so I stood and sang along with them, belting it out from the pew.

When did your voice change, and how did you deal with it?

Hard to remember exactly, although there was one incident when I was twelve. Keep in mind that I was 6'1" and weighed 215 lbs when I was twelve, so the fact that my voice changed was fairly predictable. I could always sing higher, faster, louder than my contemporaries, but that kind of thing in Dawson Creek,

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World Voice Day, April 16

Make sure your voice gets heard!



World Voice Day at the University of North Texas

Date:

Friday, April 13
12 noon - 1 p.m.

Location:

Voertman Hall in the College of Music
at UNT (Denton)

Join the UT Southwestern Clinical Center for Voice Care specialists, together with University of North Texas professors and students, as we celebrate our voice.

It's free.

It's informative.

**It's a shout out to
your voice.**

- **Learn** how to properly care for your voice with effective warm-up exercises
- **Go "green"** by exploring voice-saving conservation techniques
- **Discover** what happens during the typical visit to a laryngologist's office
- **Minimize** annoying throat congestion with mucus management strategies

Plus

- **Enjoy** performances by UNT opera, theater, and jazz students

International Voice Symposium at NYU

by Brian Gill, Filipa Lã, Johan Sundberg

The NYU Silver Center was the venue for an international voice symposium, January 5-7, 2012 initiated and organized by Brian Gill (NYU), Filipa Lã (Aveiro University, Portugal), and Johan Sundberg (KTH, Sweden). Sponsored by NYU, The Voice Foundation, Glottal Enterprises and KayPentax, this symposium served to launch the concept for an interdisciplinary institute of voice at NYU as well as to discuss specific topics in today's voice research.

First day speakers were all NYU faculty members. The speakers represented a multitude of voice perspectives: acoustics, care, development, engineering, laryngology, neurology, pedagogy, perception, psychiatry, phonetics, physics... In this way, this day demonstrated the multidisciplinary character of the voice field.

Presenters for days two and three came from several countries, Ronald Baken, Steve Crump, Brian Gill, Eric Hunter, Martin Rothenberg, Ronald Scherer, John Sidtis, Ingo Titze (USA), Jan Svec (Czech Republic), Nathalie Henrich (France), Don Miller (Holland), Filipa Lã (Portugal), and Svante Granqvist and Johan Sundberg (Sweden).

The focus of the second day was methods for measuring subglottal pressure, a key factor in voice control. The issue discussed was how it can be measured most reliably, and the blunt and discouraging answer was to insert a pressure transducer into the trachea. It can also be measured as the oral pressure during /p/-occlusion, provided that the /p/ is pronounced in an appropriate way. One trick is to have the /p/ followed by a /b/, and another recommendation, particularly useful for singer subjects, is to sing legato sequences of /p/+vowel syllables.

After a panel discussion moderated by Ron Baken, the participants split into four groups, each visiting four workshops according to a rotating scheme. Martin Rothenberg from Glottal Enterprises, demonstrated inverse filtering by means of the new Waveview software; Steve Crump, from KayPentax, demonstrated the Phonatory Aerodynamic System (PAS), which measures subglottal pressure, airflow and audio; Ingo Titze showed how phonation threshold pressures can be measured as the oral pressure during phonation through a thin straw; Filipa Lã showed how a Laryngograph-Glottal Enterprises hybrid system can simultaneously record audio, ELG, oral pressure and airflow into four-channel-files in a common PC machine.

The focus of the third day was non-linear source-filter feedback. The background was the widespread pedagogical idea that male singers should tune their lowest formants to spectrum partials in and above the passaggio. A conflicting view has emerged from Ingo Titze's models, which predict voice instabilities under these conditions. Yet another conflict was that the organizers' measurements showed that professional baritones and tenors apparently tune their lowest formants independently of the frequencies of the spectrum partials. After the presentations, Ron Scherer moderated a discussion. An important emerging question was how singers manage to avoid instabilities when formants coincide with spectrum partials. Also discussed were a number of basic issues, such as the definition and the most accurate method for measuring formants and vocal tract resonances, and whether or not there are any differences between these terms.

The symposium was attended by one hundred and fourteen participants, students, voice scientists, performers, voice educators, speech language pathologists, medical doctors, neurologists, engineers, psychologists, and psychiatrists from a great number of countries. The relaxed

atmosphere during the symposium provided an environment that stimulated invited speakers as well as the audience to raise and discuss questions related to the topics. The symposium was enthusiastically received by the participants, as demonstrated by these email comments received after the meeting:

"It was one of the most inspiring events I have experienced lately.."

"... extraordinary symposium, which I found one of the best such events in years. Telling for the conference was the alert audience, after two overfull days, for the final colloquium, where there were truly interesting exchanges, characterized by both frankness and general good will."

"... a good and professionally really useful time was had by all."

"... the symposium was superb... where researchers met to deposit their ideas and take away new ones."

This type of small symposium focusing on limited but crucial upcoming questions may serve as a valuable complement to the regular larger meetings.

Brian Gill, Filipa Lã, Johan Sundberg

"An important emerging question was how singers manage to avoid instabilities when formants coincide with spectrum partials."

Symposia Presenters:

Do You Think Research Results Are Enough?

by Lucille Rubin

Symposia presenters who want to sharpen their paper, poster and workshop presentation skills will find that working on skills is rewarding, relaxed and fun. Presenting is about **engaging the audience**, not reading aloud from a paper, prompter or notes.

Here Are Some Things Our (FREE) Presentation Coaching Can Do For You...

- * **Neutralize an accent or regionalism**
- * **Align the body for a strong body statement**
- * **Breathe freely for dismissing “stage fright”**
- * **Develop a clean and appealing vocal quality**
- * **Blend resonators for vocal power**
- * **Gesture with face and body**
- * **Find optimum pitch placement for being heard**
- * **Sharpening articulation skills: activating lips, jaw and tongue**
- * **Engage audience with face time using the “Scooping Technique”**
- * **Explore pitch, rate and volume variety**
- * **Score scripts for Phrasing, and Pausing**
- * **Observing formatting guidelines**
- * **Rehearsing with specific purpose**
- * **Honor the time limit**
- * **Amplify main ideas with slides & avoid amplification of slides.**

Thursday, May 31, 2012, 2:00pm - 6:00pm (Dr. Lucille Rubin)

Friday, June 1, 2012, 8:00am - 11:00am (Donna Snow)

Saturday, June 2, 2012, 1:00pm - 5:00pm (Dr. Susan Miller)

Alexander Technique Coaching:

Thursday, May 31, 2012 9:00am - 11:00am (Janet Madelle Feindel)

All coaching will be offered in half hour slots at the Westin Philadelphia. Board Room.

Coaches: **Lucille S. Rubin, Ph.D.**, of Professionally Speaking, NYC and Co-Chair of *Presentation Outreach* (a sub-committee of the Advisory Board), has graciously offered her gratis presentation coaching at our Symposium this year. She will again be joined by her colleague, **Susan Miller, Ph.D.**, of Voicetrainer, Washington, D.C. and author of *Be Heard the First Time*. Donna Snow, **Donna Snow, M.F.A.**, Associate Professor at Temple University Theater Department, is a Master Teacher in Fitzmaurice Voice Technique. And, **Janet Madelle Feindel**, Associate Professor, Carnegie Mellon University, Author of *The Thought Propels the Sound* (Plural Publishing). She is a certified teacher of Alexander Technique teacher.

To schedule coaching, contact Maria Russo at mrusso@voicefoundation.org

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Maria Russo, MM

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B.C., could get you beaten-up. It was a junior choir concert in the church, I went for this one big line, and my voice just suddenly broke. It wouldn't go there. I suppose there had been warning signs, but I was unaware of them. It was a big squawk moment, I was totally embarrassed and ran from the room. The choir director, who was probably only five years older than I, chased me down and calmed me down, saying, "Let's talk about it, this is normal." So in my mind it was exceedingly rapid. Within three or four months I had joined the adult choir singing bass, and it is still relatively easy for me to sing bass.

Some men in the British choral tradition kept using their treble voices while their voice dropped, and have retained a strong treble sound along with their adult voice. Although this is more normal in baritones and basses, when your voice changed, did you retain any of your choirboy treble as either an extended falsetto, or as a stronger counter-tenor sound?

We didn't have any tenors, so the choir director kept pushing me to sing the tenor line because I still had those notes. Eventually I got used to it, and stayed there. I have a relatively decent lower voice, but the tenor is the one that dominated.

Were you mixing your boy-soprano sound into your changed voice?

My voice was changed, but when I was in high school and even in university, I was the king of *voix mixte*, and didn't have a full voice access to the upper range. G4 was high, and anything beyond that was definitely in a mixed voice.

I didn't have lessons or formal training as a boy soprano, because in my family, if you couldn't sing they would have adopted you out! I first encountered classical music in the seventh grade, and having skipped ahead in school, at seventeen I went to a theological school for one year, which is where I first encountered voice training at all, with a pretty good technician. The biggest thing I learned was when I had screamed myself hoarse over the college hockey team, the next lesson consisted of a furious teacher going up one side of me and down the other for doing that to my voice. This was a very good lesson to learn.

Then I attended the University of British Columbia to study music with the idea of becoming a music teacher in the

schools. But I'm easily distracted, and kept singing for the various professors that people told me to sing for, and ended up in the top chamber groups and in the vocal performance program instead of teaching. They recommended that I sing for this or that person and I was asked, "Do you want a church job?" I just sort of put one foot in front of the other. I didn't particularly go knocking on doors, the career just kind of came to me.

There is the recommended path of the '24 Italians' then lied and art song, plus oratorio to build a voice. What age did you start singing classical music, and what kind of classical literature did you start with?

Caro mio ben is the only one I know, and that's because I am "caro" and my name is Ben. I can only sing you the first line! I never did any of that, and I think perhaps I should learn about it now, as it may be a good exercise to have that classical discipline of learning these old Italian songs. I missed it entirely at the time. I was learning some Schubert lieder, and my teacher asked, "Who have you been listening to this week?" "Hans Hotter, why?" "Ok, wonderful singer, but he's not your voice type." I would listen to and mimic the voices I was hearing.



Ben Heppner as Peter Grimes

When did you add opera into the mix?

Because my teacher at the University was the opera director, I performed the Prince in *Rusalka* in an English translation in my third year. That was the only full role I did until I was in the Canadian Opera Company (COC) Ensemble program.

Somebody's masters or doctoral project was to produce an opera, so I sang the Apprentice (also in English) in Hayden's *Der Apotheker*. That was my entire exposure to the opera world. I didn't 'get' opera, to be quite frank, it was a foreign concept. It seemed strange to be singing very intimate things at very loud levels. But eventually I thought I had to approach it as a pragmatic choice to add to the other things I was doing in oratorio and recital. I realized I couldn't earn my living singing oratorios and concerts, and opera was something people were telling me I should explore, so I moved from Montréal to Toronto to go to opera school in the summer of 1981.

What did you have to do technically to bring opera into the mix?

Even at that point, I had a music degree and was going to 'opera school', but I don't think I really got the opera thing, although the guy in Vancouver was working hard to get me to understand that

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kind of singing. When I first got to opera school, I was still singing a rather detached top. I was studying with the teacher in Toronto and with her permission with a second teacher at the Eastman School in Rochester, New York, which was a three-hour drive. It was that fellow, John Malloy, who was the first one to get me to a more operatic focus to my voice, and certainly the one who opened up my top range.

One of the things that changed over time was the breathing. I had been taught to lift the abdominal muscles in support of the voice, literally to suck my stomach in. Finally I got with a teacher who said, "No, no, no!" and taught me to open up my abdominal cavity instead of pulling it in and closing it up. That made a big difference, and the actual pressure on my vocal folds started to be more constant. It wasn't over-pressured the way it is with the lifting of the abdominal muscles. When the abdominal cavity is opened, then the whole mechanism right through your vocal folds, your upper body, neck and head opens up as well. That all of a sudden made a big difference in getting a tenor focus in the sound.

How long did it take you to make the jump from knocking on the various doors to having them open for you? When did you know that you were launched in the career?

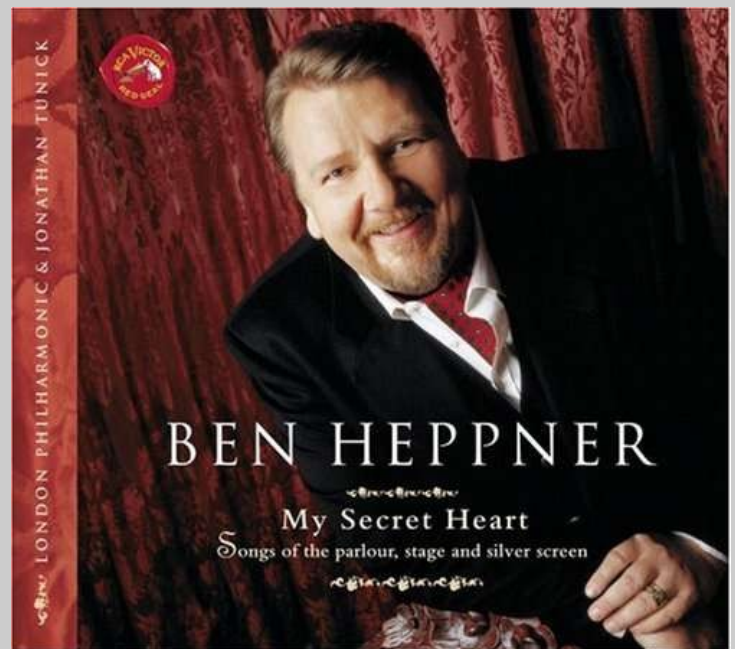
The career thing happened at the same time as the Met auditions in April of 1988. In addition to being one of eleven winners that year, I won the Birgit Nilsson prize. I felt very honored to have won this prize, and the change was almost instantaneous. Within the next two weeks I began to realize, "I may have a career here." Agents appeared out of the woodwork, work began to appear, and my first job was for that summer in Melbourne, Australia, singing Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos* which is long way from the lyric tenor repertoire I'd been singing in Toronto.

I was working with William Neill, and we had started moving from lyric tenor toward spinto. There were a couple of weeks of that, and then he told me, "Helden tenor is where you are going to be appreciated" and we started working that direction. During 1987 into 1988, the year of the competition, I ended up changing my repertoire with each successive round of the Met finals becoming more German with each round.

What parts of your general (non-musical) education have been most useful to you in the career?

I was the worst actor, and had this feeling inside of me that I could unlock this and be a lot better but didn't know how. I was working a one-act opera with Robert Carsen and he refused to tell me what to do, making me come up with my own solutions to the aria. He helped me learn how to find it on my own, going through the obvious to the deeper levels. It started unlocking me, I've improved a lot over time, and think I've gotten there. I think now I'm able to share the intimacy of Tristan who is talking about how his father sired him and died, his mother bore him and died, and here he is, this poor guy who is all alone. I love being very vulnerable in those situations.

It has long been said that a singer does not get their full instrument



until age thirty-two and comes into the full strength of the instrument in the forties. Of course we grow as an artist and gain technique all along the way, but looking simply at the evolving vocal apparatus over time, what was your experience?

At the age of thirty-two I won the Met. I definitely was not ready any earlier to win, and a lot of it was vocal maturity. I think I needed to do this work switching from lyric to spinto/young Helden, and I wasn't ready to do that up until then, probably because of vocal and emotional maturity. There was a lot going on before then that hadn't come together until age thirty-two, and then it was stunning how fast everything moved in the '87-'88 season. Thirty-two was when everything started for me. Interestingly, at this point I would not be allowed to compete, as the Met has reduced the cut-off age for the competition to thirty. For any large-voice singer it is probably not going to happen in their twenties.

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I don't remember a lot about the twenties; too busy marrying and siring children I think! But I do remember a vocal shift. I knew there was more inside of me but couldn't figure out how to access it. While working with the Canadian Opera Company, I talked to Neil Shicoff and asked him, "Neil, you are relatively small in stature yet you've got this enormous voice. What are you doing to get that?" He talked about the idea of 'sitting down' on the sound; that you don't pull in, you open out. That started to work, but I had had no teaching in that direction, so I didn't really know what to do with the information. Just before that time there was lots of promise in my voice, but I wasn't fulfilling that promise simply because I wasn't aware of how to make that idea of opening out work for me. Because I didn't really understand the concept, and didn't have a teacher during those couple of years, it started to go the wrong way and work against me instead of for me. During this time I was singing concerts, oratorios and small roles with the opera, struggling to figure it all out. It wasn't until I found a teacher who understood it all that I got on the right track.

Into the forties the voice was opening up and picking up some colors that previously did not exist, and I had the maturity to be able to handle that. I don't remember momentous things happening other than adding *Tristan* into my repertoire, which is enough to give you pause! With *Tristan*, which is long and arduous, every little problem or habit that is not particularly positive will wear you out something fierce in the course of that opera. I found singing *Tristan* to be a really good thing, simply because I had to address those things that are not helpful, stop doing them, and figure out a new way. It was just too tiring. So I found *Tristan* to be an enormously helpful role for that.

Earlier on, my biggest calling cards were *Lohengrin* and *Meistersinger* and I found that doing these big roles was a positive thing for technique. You have to stay so focused and produce wonderful *bel canto* singing to sustain yourself through the five and a half hours of a *Meistersinger*.

Things are going very well right now. Now that I am beyond my forties, I feel like new colors and more mature sounds are being incorporated into the instrument, and that

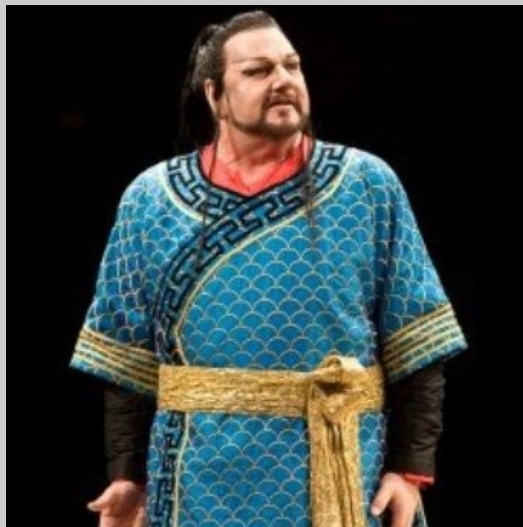
now I am mature enough to explore some of the more baritone colors in the upper reaches. I didn't go there before because I felt it would limit the endurance and stamina on any given evening. But that has started to shift. If you are doing it right, and are open and free, it doesn't. That's what I'm working on with my present teacher.

Does one's mental/emotional state affect the voice?

There's no question it does. Perhaps we are not quite aware of how *much* it affects our voice. If for some reason you are experiencing difficulties emotionally or whatever, you are going to struggle. I've seen it and experienced it. In a sense its not just about technical issues, a lower larynx or a higher something or other – its not just about physical manipulation, there is a real mental/emotional component that fits in here. Some of the roles

take a big emotional toll on you. I don't have the feeling I *am* Tristan in the Method sense of 'in order to act drunk you have to be drunk', but these are normal human emotions that you are connecting to that everyone has, and that's why a piece like *Tristan* touches so many people. These roles carry a certain weight. From the very first moment *Tristan* opens his mouth, he has an emotional weight in his voice, and that appears not only in your voice but it also transfers into or encourages reflections in your own body. It might be easier to sing happy roles!

Yes, I have been revisiting some of my darker roles, and had forgotten just how heavy it is emotionally to go there in their music.



Ben Heppner as Calaf in Turandot

I think I ignored it for a long time and the potential effect it has. Peter Grimes is another one of those roles, and Peter and *Tristan* have been two of my best roles. There is a resonating theme that goes through them that makes me excel at them, but it may have a negative effect as well, and as an artist you have to figure out how to deal with that.

I've gotten better at dealing with it over time. First I needed to recognize that it was happening, that I was being affected, and needed to counter their influence. Now I know that the day after a show I will probably have 'Wagner-lag'. Part of it is the exertion involved plus staying up late and eating afterwards. I say that it's a lot like jetlag but much more Teutonic.

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What have been some of the big technical “ah HA” moments for you along the way?

*Breath was an early one that I continue to revisit often.

*And a surprising one was that big repertoire can be useful for your technique – it can be like giving yourself a lesson.

*Once when I was singing along during a big chorus moment I thought, “Wait.. they want my job. Why don’t I let them do it and give myself a rest?” The tenors are screaming along with you, why fight it? I’m trying to be a more clever singer and be better at pacing.

*One of the things I love about the big repertoire is that I like the challenge of figuring out how to get through it with the resources I have in the moment. I love the strategizing involved of how am I going to get through it tonight? With the big roles, you generally leave all the voice on the stage, so you have to figure out how to mete it out along the way so you don’t fall short by three or four pages. It is rather like a REALLY interactive video game.

How do you ‘let loose’ and let the voice flow through you?

I like to think I just open my mouth and let it fly, but of course you don’t, you have to have filters. One of the things that happens to me is a tendency when I get down into the lower end of the voice to kind of relax or ‘open the gates’ a bit, which is not a good thing. In my mid-fifties I find that you need to be as vigilant in the lower end as in the upper ranges to make sure everything is focused and spun in the right kind of way. All of a sudden the tone doesn’t sustain in the lower range because the air is not moving fast enough to keep things in line, and you tend to come off your voice. In the upper range you have to have the breath flowing well, so you are more naturally thinking that way and now I find that the air also needs to have a lot of speed in the lower range for the voice to focus, rather than thinking I can sit back and relax.

Is your experience more one of observing yourself or of manipulating sound when you sing?

Probably a bit of both, from my perspective. Sometimes you can do it from the observing point of view, when you get up into the upper range and you need to get over a high note which may be a little troublesome, and you step back and observe, “Its working now, lets just keep it there.” But in the dramatic repertoire you do get into the dramatic side, which sometimes is a good thing, sometimes not. So you need to find a way to do both, to be both involved and

also a bit arm’s length with technique. You can’t let your emotions take over. You can’t be crying uncontrollably on stage. Think about singing at a funeral, how you shove those emotions in the back corner until the singing is done. You have to arm’s-length your emotions, which is why I wouldn’t sing at my daughter’s wedding. I sang at the reception, but not at the wedding, where I wanted to be Dad first and foremost, but I also felt I would be suppressing emotions I needed to experience.

Along with the exercise of singing and rehearsing itself, are there specific types of exercise that you do (walking, stretches, yoga, tai chi, running, cardio, weights, resistance, etc.)



Ben Heppner and Karita Mattila in Lohengrin

Walking, I go to the gym, only light weight lifting, mostly aerobic kind of things like some biking and cross-training activities. Walking is predominant.

There is a long-running debate about the effects of weight gain and loss on voice and breath support. What are your opinions on this topic?

Do you realize you are talking to an expert here? I have gained and lost the weight of an entire Ethiopian village in my lifetime! For me, there was that big weight loss back in 2003, and critics were quick to cite it in reviews, but it was the result of coming off a medication that had been causing difficulties. There was a rebalancing of the support mechanism that had to happen, which I had to figure out on the fly, and I was getting my confidence back after the problems caused by this drug. The adjustment was multi-layered for me, but it definitely feels different with less weight.

Do you have a performance day preparation pattern? Has that changed over time?

Yes. The thing that interrupts it the most is a matinee or those European performances that begin at 4 pm. And I think, “How can I sing Tristan at 4 pm! I have to be at the theatre at 2, and that’s nap time – what are you doing to me!”

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So my normal routine would be a relatively standard day. I'm not someone who can sleep in, but I take a nap in the afternoon for about an hour. The whole idea is not sleeping *per se*, but it is a time to clear my mind and when I stand up again my whole focus is on the performance. I like clearing my mind about that day and restarting the day. Most of my performances begin at 6 or 6:30 pm because of their length, so I get to the theatre by 4 or 4:30 pm. I've seen some singers arrive just in the nick of time, and don't know how they do it! I don't have that kind of nerve. I want to be there and be calm and let everyone know I'm there so they aren't worried. There's time to kibbutz with a few people, get your makeup and costume and be calm.

How much vocalizing is too much before a performance? How do you know the fine line between "warmed up" and being in danger of "leaving your voice in the dressing room"?

What opera are we talking about? If you're doing *Fidelio* or *Rusalka*, you have to warm up. I understand that *Aida* is a warm-up opera. With *Meistersinger* I didn't do a lot, because it's all built into the singing for you. You don't have to come on and do your best singing right away. But in *Fidelio* you have to be ready to shine right away. *Lohengrin* has a famous entrance, but you can warm up lightly – you don't have to warm up the whole Mack truck because you are only using a little bit of it for the first while, and you kind of grow with the role. I like those roles where your vocal pacing has been done by the composer. I'm not the personality to warm up too much, to over-sing before the performance, so I need to make sure I'm warmed up enough.

In some recent studies on vocal recovery after a major vocal event, they found that there were predictable "bumps" the day after and two days after, which helps explain why a Sunday matinee might be troublesome after a Friday night performance. What is your optimal vocal rest/recovery time after singing a performance?

Normally with the Wagner repertoire you sing, have two days off, then sing again. Those two days off are necessary. I remember that early on that didn't feel like enough time, and I would find that I could barely talk when I woke up the morning after a *Tristan*. But I became much better at that with much less wear and tear, and two days is now enough. I would struggle doing it with one day's rest, but you can do it. Recently I did a *Peter Grimes* with a Friday night and Sunday



Heppner in the Bolshoi's Boris Godunov

matinee, and yes, that was tough. You could feel the wear and tear from Friday's performance.

Reflux as a topic is guaranteed to keep a group of singers talking for hours. Has it been a concern for you? Do you keep it at bay with diet, antacids, or medication?

Practically every otolaryngologist has the word 'reflux' coming out of their mouth before they put in the scope. I have a bit of a different perspective, and think it is way overrated. There are people who think they don't have a career because of reflux, and my feeling is that yes, there is a

feedback factor that is strong and you don't feel things the way they were. I've struggled with reflux, but I don't think it has as big an effect as it is made out to have. I understand that that is a controversial viewpoint. I do use medication during a run of performances, mostly to counter eating late after a performance, but I don't take medication during the rehearsal period or in daily life. You need to control your reflux but it's only a part of the story.

How do plane flights affect your voice? What do you do to compensate/ameliorate?

I don't have a particular problem. Of course you want to try and drink a lot of water, but I find that when I fly overseas, the day after I can sing really, really well. Then it sort of deteriorates for the next two or three days after that, before it builds back up again. I say, "You'll have to forgive me, my voice is over Ireland." It feels dry and unresponsive and doesn't speak as quickly. The process of my body acclimatizing to the new time zone almost exactly compares to the singing. Jet lag is done when my sleep pattern is back. So I find that I want to either do the performance right away, or wait for a week.

The Voice Foundation promotes the idea of a team approach to solving vocal health issues. What has your experience been with Otolaryngologists when you are on the road?

I have an otolaryngologist that I go to in New York just because I can get in with her quickly and easily. I have to say I love the Canadian medical system, but I don't have as quick an access to the ENT here.

On the road, a lot depends on how long ago they were trained. The old-school ones don't even have a way to give you a picture

(Continued from page 9)

of your vocal folds, much less a digital version which is what I prefer. The digital version I can keep in my file and share with my ENT in New York, asking her, ‘Hey this is what’s going on, what do you think?’”

The bigger centers in North America and Europe have good people, but sometimes in the smaller places they’re really not up on the singers’ world. They may be fine otolaryngologists, but they don’t keep singers’ issues in mind. I’ve had some beauts along the way. Sometimes they promote homeopathic remedies, which take *time*, which I don’t have. Sometimes I felt that the ENT was working for the opera company instead of for me, which perhaps clouded them. They saw their job as getting me back into the show as quickly as possible and one even injected me without my permission.

In a related medical story, during the *Tristan* at the Met where every performance had a different tenor, I went to two doctors (not ENTs, because there was no problem with my voice) and they completely missed a blood infection. The horrible thing was, I was singing really, really well, but I was hallucinating and sweating to the point where I lost 30 lbs in three or four days over the worst weekend, with water dripping from my sheets. I find it difficult to believe that the doctors couldn’t have picked that up. In retrospect, I think their main problem was arrogance. One knew I’d been in touch with my Canadian primary care physician, and he took a shot at the Canadian medical system, which I found inappropriate. I think he did what he thought the Canadian medical system would do, which was that he didn’t test me properly. He said, “Oh, you

have a virus, go away.” As soon as the Met released me and I returned home, my doctor took me to Emergency because he had an idea through our phone discussions what it might be. I ended up nine days in the hospital, but it could have been much worse if things had gone any longer.

Mostly I’ve had very good experiences. Once I had a doctor ask, “Ok Ben, when do you need to sing again?” I answered, “When you say I need to sing again.” He responded, “I think I’ll write this on my calendar – I’ve never had a singer say that to me!” We also need to listen to their advice and not pressure them to get us back singing before we’re really ready. Often the good ones say, “You shouldn’t sing” rather than giving you a something-or-other to make you sing. I think most often the best thing is to wait, unless there’s no one else to sing the role.



After thirty years performing over seventy roles, **Martha Howe** is now an international vocal coach and teacher, with students performing professionally in Europe and the U.S.



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IMPORTANT DATES, UPCOMING CONFRENCES & EVENTS

April 16, 2012

- World Voice Day

May 30—June 3, 2012

- 41st Annual Symposium: Care of the Professional Voice

June 1, 2012

- Voices of Summer Gala

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Medical Panel:

Management of Complications in
Endoscopic Microlaryngeal Surgery.

Moderator: Michael Pitman (NYEE) Panelists:
Jonathan Bock (MCW), David Francis
(Vanderbilt), Adam Rubin, Tom Carroll, MD
(Boston)

Keynote Speaker - Quintana Award

Kiyoshi Honda, MD, DMSc

The Voice and Evolution

Thorough the Time Space Continuum

Vocal Master Class

Frederica von Stade

Medical Panel:

Stroboscopy Oscars

Moderator: Michael M. Johns III

Panelists: TBD

G. Paul Moore Lecture

Peak Woo, MD

Imaging of Vocal Fold Vibration During Phonation:

What's New Since Dr. Moore

Friday Morning Session: The Voice Sleuth

Malcom Brenner, PhD, James Harnsberger,

PhD, Harry Hollein, PhD

Ruth Huntley Behr, PhD

Nancy Pearl Solomon, PhD, CCC-SLP