

## ***The Singer's Voice***

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he practical information in *The Singer's Voice* is applicable to all voice

professionals and those who train and care for them. As the title would suggest, it is an accessible guidebook into the mechanics of singing and further explores the demands and variables of performance on the performer and their instrument, the mind-body-spirit connectivity, and the pervading influence of the individual's training and psychophysical perception.

The book is organized into three sections; 1. Overview, 2. Assessment and Diagnosis, and 3. Treatments, with an Appendix on Vocal Hygiene and a Glossary of predominantly classical, operatic and performance terminology. The chapters are written by professionals in various disciplines related to the care and treatment of performers and voice professionals, resulting in an interesting informational bridge between medical professionals, performers and vocal instructors.

*The Singer's Voice* begins with the anatomy of the vocal mechanism, followed by a discussion of the primary theories of how the mechanism works. Those who wrestle with vocal technique will not be surprised to learn that no one theory explains it all, and that Chaos theory has been called upon with regard to vibratory patterns. The first section concludes with a chapter on the importance of the mind-body-spirit connection, and finding the —system's balance|| no matter what style one chooses to sing.

This organizational flow of information (what are we looking at, how does it works, what is the context and the effect of the context) is repeated in the Assessment and Diagnosis section in which Benninger and Murry emphasize employing quality of life assessments when diagnosing performers. Because of their heightened proprioception, singers will often present to their doctors earlier, with more subtle changes, than other voice professionals. Methods of laryngeal examination and common pathologies are covered along with an introduction to the research related to the auditory perceptual process with regard to singing. Although it is noted that there are no defined standards for perceptual assessment of the singing voice and few protocols exist, guidelines are given and an assessment form is proffered for the physician's use.

Two Austrian physicians attending to participants of the Salzburg Festival contribute a fascinating chapter on assessing and treating both the underlying malady and the psychophysical and psychological state of the performer. Along with individual case studies, there is data on the distribution of disorders from their evaluation of 74 professional singers over five Festival seasons. This chapter emphasizes the role of the in-tense stress felt by performers and how physicians can also provide psychological guidance: —If the singer can be convinced that he is capable of giving an adequate performance, then his biological processes will alter accordingly.|| (p. 82)

## TVF Book Corner

***“What separates singers and actors from other voice professionals is the artistic demands of the performance” (p. 118)***

Martha Howe

The final section, Treatments, takes into consideration both standard medications and complementary and alternative medications (CAM) and techniques. Its first chapter assesses the impact on the voice of many of the standard and over the counter medications with charts both on recommended drug therapy for common complaints and on which drugs may induce dryness, warning that NSAIDs should be avoided when singing, as —the anti-coagulant effect of such drugs increases the risk for vocal fold hemorrhage.|| (p. 100)

Research shows that the vast majority of singers regularly use CIM therapies, and it is suggested that physicians take this into account when they consult with performers, especially when prescribing medications that may inter-act with herbs and nutraceuticals. The second chapter of this final section gives the history of pre- and post-Descartes mind-body-spirit understanding, discusses vitamins, nutraceuticals, and complementary therapies, and provides an extensive table of herbs used for medicinal purposes with indications, actions, contraindications, side effects, interactions and dosages. The chapter ends with a reminder that —modalities we may consider to be alternative‘ are mainstream and accepted practices elsewhere in the world.|| (p. 115)

Benign vocal fold lesions and scarring in singers and actors are discussed, with the differences in vocal training and resulting lesions found comparing classical and commercial contemporary music (CCM) singers. This is followed by an informative chapter on breathing and how to identify the characteristics in the body of healthy voice usage. The idea that tension has a physical history in the body is addressed, and the Alexander Technique is explained and offered as a method for facilitating the release of tension, along with a series of practical, effective exercises to increase breath awareness. Tension as a primary culprit appears again in an exploration of the problems that result when actors, dancers, instrumentalists and singers are suddenly called upon to cross-perform in combinations that might be musically or physically viable, but outside the scope of their training.

The cognitive, somatic and behavioral components of performance anxiety are presented from a cognitive-behavioral understanding of anxiety, with explanations of and useful models for relaxation training, stress inoculation training, mindfulness and acceptance, and exposure and rehearsal. The point is made that whereas in social anxiety the primary concern is with negative appraisal from others, in performance anxiety there is often a much greater emphasis on negative self-appraisal.

The final chapter suggests surgery should be considered only as a last option as most vocal disorders can be resolved non-surgically, and that the singer’s compliance with recommended treatments is paramount to success. Discussing the decision-making process between physician and singer, Benninger stresses the importance of the voice treatment team’s input, adjusting to the singer’s performance schedule, and factoring in the receptivity of the singer to change.

The wide-ranging, practical information in *The Singer’s Voice* makes it useful for members of voice treatment teams in their understanding of the medical, physical and psychological issues particular to singers and performers, as well as being an accessibly written reference for all voice professionals, especially actors, singers, choral directors, vocal coaches and voice teachers.

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