



*National Association
of Teachers of Singing*
San Francisco
Bay Area Chapter
Newsletter

October 2008

Letter from our President

Tis the season for applications. Students are applying to schools and summer programs and apprenticeships, and they all want to know which ones are the best and which ones they should apply for and do I think they'll get into Merola. And can I write a letter of recommendation—of course I'll be happy to—and then they hand you a pile of envelopes that's two inches thick three days before the deadline.

As my mother would say: Oh joy, oh bliss.

Did you happen to see the little article that Darren Woods wrote in *Classical Singer* a year or two ago about not writing letters of recommendation any more? His point was that it would be so much easier for singers to provide email addresses for a list of references, then anyone who needs to know about the singer can just email him and others on the list directly. In addition to eliminating the need to write and send all those letters, he can be more specific, and more honest. No more carefully-worded form letters! This sounds good to me!

I've also heard that the Opera America Singer Training Forum is going to develop a standard recommendation form that we can use instead of the old-fashioned letter. We'll probably be able to do the whole thing online, which also sounds great. But what will I do with all that fancy letterhead stationery I paid so much for? I guess it will make good shopping lists.

As a singer, I did a number of apprenticeships, and I can personally attest that they are fantastic for meeting people and forming friendships that will be the basis of your network for years to come. But I also remember feeling very conflicted about the vocal advice I was getting, and trying to relate it to what my teacher at home would say.

So now as a teacher I just love it [not!] when my students go to programs and get told that they need to move to the east coast, because "there's nothing on the west coast." Gee, thanks a lot. Come to think of it, I have all sorts of issues whenever a student auditions outside school, because I know how I react when I hear somebody else's student. You always intend to be charitable and tolerant

about your colleague's teaching, but there's just this natural tendency to blame the teacher when something isn't technically secure. It's not fair to do that, because we all know that singers rarely sing "state of the art" at auditions—there's always a lag time between when a new vocal idea is discovered and when it is learned well enough that it doesn't go out the window at the first sign of stress. I think we all know the feeling, as singers as well as teachers, and it's just frustrating for everybody.

And as long as I'm revealing my insecurities about students working with other teachers at programs: what about when my long-time student tells me that she just adored working with because he/she had so many ways to make her sing so much better. At last she knows the Secret of Bel Canto! We all know what that's about—the master class syndrome, where it's so easy to zero in on one or two specific things, and by throwing a few new ideas around, the singer makes a big improvement and everyone thinks you're a genius. Meanwhile the studio teacher has said the same thing again and again, and the student just wasn't hearing it, for whatever reason. It feels kind of like a kid listening to his mother tell him to make his bed. What's up with that?

Maybe I should just tell them that no, they're not ready to audition for any programs (to say nothing of Merola!), that the program in Europe would be great and lots of fun but it will cost mega-bucks they don't have, what they really should do is stay here and study Italian and listen to the complete Schubert recording by Fischer-Dieskau and for heaven's sake buckle down and learn how to sing.

Well, maybe not. But in my dreams...

Looking forward! -Wendy

MEET YOUR COLLEAGUES!

Everyone is invited to

OUR NEXT SFBAC-NATS BOARD MEETING

When: Sunday, November 23, 2008, 2:30-4:00 p.m.

Where: The Studio of Sue Field

2007-2008 Officers

President: Wendy Hillhouse	whillhouse@aol.com
Vice President of Programs: Sue Field	mezzo54@comcast.net
Vice President of Recitals: Victoria Rapanan	vrsing@sbcglobal.net
Vice President of Festival: April McNeely	april_mcneely@yahoo.com
Treasurer: Dorothy Barnhouse	dorbarn@sbcglobal.net
Recording Secretary: Tina Baird	tinabaird@earthlink.net
Membership Secretary: Grace Johnson	johnsongmw@yahoo.com
Correspondence Secretary: Alison Collins	alisonc@ix.netcom.com
Newsletter Editor: Joshua Ian Elder	joshuaianelder@hotmail.com
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NATS SFBAC FALL SYMPOSIUM

Sunday, October 12th 2008 1.30pm – 5.30pm

Osher Salon of the San Francisco Conservatory

The Anatomy of Wholeness: Foundation of Freedom for Singers

featuring

Babette Lightner

Stones in Water

Movement Education and Learning Methods

www.babettelightner.com

This workshop presents a new model for understanding human structure and function and the implications of this model for singing and teaching singing.

SFBACNATS is thrilled to bring Babette to San Francisco, to share this exciting research (based on anatomist and master teacher David Gorman) Those of us who attended the Rhode Island NATS 2007 summer workshop where she was a presenter felt exhilarated after her sessions there.

In addition to the Sunday workshop, Babette will be available that weekend for private or semi-private sessions. These will take place in Redwood City.

References

‘ My teaching has been revolutionized by what I learned from you’ (She gave a student, suffering from anxiety and negative thinking some written material) ‘I was teaching a new person’ The student said ‘ I worked a piece tonight using that approach and the difference was unbelievable’

A voice professor left a message, to his effect. ‘ I can safely say I have never felt so fantastic in my teaching, nor have I ever felt so able to facilitate some exciting self-discovery for people. I have never seen so much progress in my students, at such a rate. They are just on top of the world’

Information: Sue Field (Program Chair) 650-796-1829
or mezzo54@comcast.net

**The Anatomy of Wholeness:
Foundation of Freedom for Singers**

featuring

Babette Lightner

Sunday, October 12th 2008 1.30pm – 5.30pm
Osher Salon of the San Francisco Conservatory

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

There are Three Ways to Register

You may register online using Paypal:
www.sfbacnats.org; go to Programs 2007/8

You may register at the door on the day of the event.
Please remember that seating is limited

You may also register, by mail.
Send this form and checks (made out to SFBACNATS) to:
Sue Field, 2245 Brewster Avenue, Redwood City, 94062

REGISTRATION FORM

(You should have received this already in the mail, but just in case, here it is again!)

Name.....

Phone.....

E mail.....

Cost: SFBACNATS members \$20

Students (any age) \$10

Others \$30

Please note these prices are the lowest for any workshop in years!

Questions: Sue Field VP Programs mezzo54@comcast.net

I am also taking bookings for private/semi private session with Babette on Saturday, October 11th. These take place in my studio, behind the above address.

Please e-mail me to book your session with Babette.



STUDENT RECITALS

I am pleased to announce that there are **THREE** NATS Student Recitals scheduled for November, including a brand new venue in SF!! We have not had an SF recital besides the Late Bloomers in 2 years! Please read the descriptions of each recital below and contact the recital coordinators ASAP to add your students to the program. Everything is streamlined for you; Recital Applications are available at: <http://www.sfbacnats.org/Recitals.htm>.

You can fill in the blanks and email the app directly to the coordinator!

Sunday, November 2, 2008 at 3:00 PM

Late Bloomers Voice Party (*for students who started voice lessons after the age of 35*)
Community Music Center, 741 30th Avenue, San Francisco
Contact Dorothy Barnhouse: dorbarn@sbcglobal.net or (415) 221-5915

This Voice Party was fully booked with a waiting list last year. The Late Bloomers program really fills a need for singers who started voice lessons after the age of 35, who might not feel comfortable performing in other NATS recitals.

***new! Saturday, November 8, 2008 at 5:00 PM**

St Mark's Lutheran Church

1111 O'Farrell Street (at Franklin)
San Francisco, CA 94102

contact Justin Montigne: justin@justinmontigne.com or 415-420-1189

This is a lovely space visually and acoustically--a real treat for our singers and audience. St Mark's is concert home to many of the premiere ensembles in the Bay Area, and we're grateful to them for their generosity in offering up the space for SFBAC NATS to use. Please support this new venue and help make it a success!

Sunday, November 9, 2008 at 3:00 PM

Rossmoor - Gateway Clubhouse, Fireside Room. Walnut Creek
Contact Victoria Rapanan: vrising@sbcglobal.net, (925) 216-5913

This is SFBAC's oldest recital venue and by far the most generous. Rossmoor does a great job in advertising these recitals in their community newspaper, and they even tape the program for their local TV station. Our singers get to perform for a large, fairly sophisticated and appreciative audience. Last year's recital had approximately 100 people and featured singers from age 16 to 60!

And here's one for next year!

Sunday, February 15, 2009 at 3:00pm

Peace Lutheran, 3201 Camino Tassajara, Danville
Contact Sue Field: mezzo54@comcast.net

Thank you for supporting our SFBAC Recitals!
Victoria Rapanan
Vice President, Recitals

We Need Help Finding a Singing Festival Venue!

Wondering why you haven't heard anything
about the date for the Singing Festival?

The state budget crisis is impacting us directly—the CSU campuses we've used for the Singing Festival are asking for lots and lots of money to use the facilities that have previously been nearly free. We're looking for a facility that has at least 5 rooms with pianos that can be used for concurrent judging and workshops, plus warm-up rooms and a concert hall for the winners' concert. We've found a couple of possibilities that could work but are less than ideal.

Do you have any connections or ideas?

Please email April McNeely ASAP!

april_mcneely@yahoo.com

Please Welcome Our Newest Members

Eddie Delegans

305 Robinwood Lane
Hillsborough, CA 94010
edieopera@comcast.net

Uma Errickson

450 Redwood Ave.
Redwood City, CA 94061

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CARMEL MUSIC SOCIETY

33rd Annual Competition (Vocal)

May 16, 2009

The 2009 Competition is open to vocalists who are at least 18 years of age but are no older than 32 years of age on the day of the Competition. The \$5,000 Grand Prize consists of a \$3,000 cash award and a \$2,000 contract to appear in May 2010, during the following season of the Carmel Music Society's subscription series of recitals. A \$2,000 Second Prize and a \$1,500 Third Prize will be awarded. Each remaining finalist will be awarded \$500.

Eligibility

Contestants must be either residents or full-time students in the States of California, Oregon or Washington, or have been born in those States, and be no younger than 18 nor older than 32 on May 16, 2009. Performers who are currently or have ever been under professional management as individuals, or who have previously won a Carmel Music Society Grand Prize, are not eligible for the Competition.

For complete details, including rules, regulations, requirements and application materials, go to www.carmelmusic.org and click on competitions.

MINUTES OF THE SFBAC BOARD MEETING

September 28, 2008

Present: Victoria Rapanan, April McNeely, Sue Field, Alison Collins, Dorothy Barnhouse, Grace Johnson, Tina Baird, Wendy Hillhouse

Visitor: Sharon Kaye Absent: Meghan Dibble, Joshua Elder

Both absentees sent reports to be read at the meeting.

Meeting was called to order at 2:35 PM.

President's report: Wendy

A. Change date of annual meeting.

The date of the 2009 annual meeting has been changed from June 21 to the weekend of June 13-14. The exact date is TBA.

B. Membership lists

Currently there are about 70 teachers who are members of national NATS who are not members of our local chapter. We should work to get these teachers into our membership. Sharon explained that some teachers' organizations combine national and regional dues together. Some discussion was held about this as being feasible and desirable for our chapter.

Membership report: Grace

We have two new members: Edie Delagans and Uma Errikson.

In process are Richard Fey and Deborah McQueen.

Corresponding Secretary report: Alison

Announcements (auditions, performances, job opportunities, class meetings, and other announcements can be sent to Alison to be forwarded to SFBAC members. Alison will forward them from the email address SFBACNATS1@gmail.com.

Singing Festival report: April

Venue for the 2009 Singing Festival is still being decided. The date for the event is dependent on the venue. We should book the SF Conservatory now for the 2010 Festival. We have a priority status for bookings with the Conservatory and in this time of economic crunch, it behooves us to use this advantage.

Recital report: Victoria

New member Justin Montigne has secured a recital venue for Saturday, November 8 at 5 PM at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in San Francisco.

We also have a Late Bloomers recital on Sunday, Nov. 2 and a Rossmoor recital in Walnut Creek on Nov. 9 at 3 PM. There is a recital on February 15 at Peace Lutheran in Danville.

Webmaster's report: Meghan (Meghan's report was read by Wendy.)

Meghan is working on upgrading our website and finding a new host. She is getting estimates and will email the Board for approval. Will check on scholarships; also about the Oren Brown DVD.

Newsletter report: Joshua (Joshua's report was read by Wendy.)

Joshua apologized that the September newsletter was 4 days late. He expects to get the October newsletter out on time, though he may wait for these minutes.

Treasurer's report: Dorothy

We are in financial good health.

Recording Secretary's report: Tina

Tina is still having quarrels with her computer. Alison will help.

Program report: Sue

A. Fall workshop

Logistics for the Babette Lightner presentation are under control. We will be able to accept at-the-door registrations. Conservatory students will be admitted free of charge, as the Conservatory is giving us the use of the Osher Salon. Anatomy of Wholeness: Foundations of Freedom for Singers will be held from 1:30 to 5:30 PM on Sunday, October 12. For more information visit www.babettelightner.com or call Sue Field at 650/796-1829 or email mezzo54@comcast.net. National is giving us matching funds for this event.

B. Spring workshop: Still in planning stages.

C. Summer workshop

This is a comprehensive proposal by Wendy. April moved and Grace seconded that we should have summer performance workshop(s). Sharon Kaye volunteered to organize it, as Santa Clara is a probable venue the first week in August. This will be inexpensive for students and will use SFBAC teachers as panelists. Wendy suggested that the Conservatory might also be a venue for a second workshop.

Other business:

Grace said that before her presentation of her research at the SFBAC workshop, USA doors had been shut to her. Since her presentation to us, she has been asked, and has given a number of presentations. The most recent was in Philadelphia. People present in Philadelphia have invited her to present in San Francisco. She thanked SFBAC for our support.

Sue Field said that as a result of the presentation she and her husband Mike made on the use of technology, she had made a technology presentation to MTNA, and has now become the recording secretary for that organization for the state of California.

Tina said that as the Board has said it does not think SFBACNATS should support advocating styles of pedagogy, she wanted to make it clear that the DVD "Air Is A Gift", which Lyric Images is currently working on, is primarily concerned with anatomy and physiology, not with pedagogy. It is not about how to teach.

Wendy suggested that we have luncheon get-togethers.

We need to have a blurb in the newsletter

"Meet your colleagues! Everybody is invited to . . ."

Next Board meeting will be at Sue's studio on Sunday, November 23 at 2:30 PM.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Tina Baird, Recording Secretary

Stage Director Nathaniel Merrill dies

September 9th 2008 aged 81

Affectionally known as 'Nat' he directed operas at the Met from 1956 to 1985 . These included 14 new productions, and numerous revivals. His production of Der Rosenklavier remains in the Met's repertory to this date.

Moving from New York in the 80's to Denver with his second wife, Louise Sherman, they established Opera Colorado, with Louise as Music Director and Nat as Stage Director.

In the early days all the operas, were in the round and performed in Denver's Symphony Hall; the Boettcher. I sang with the company from 1991 to '95 and remember well Nat's admonition to never let anyone (in the audience) see your back! It led to some fabulous, natural staging and, for the performer, the experience was exhilarating with monitors all around. A memorable experience was the 1992 Die Meistersinger, (never performed in the round previously) .

Opera Colorado was like a family, on a budget. During my time there, the chorus was non-AGMA which resulted in rather paltry pay, but lots of fun. During one rehearsal (for Figaro, I think) Nat asked the chorus, 'Who wants to dance?' They had axed the ballet, due to a budget crunch but retained the Russian choreographer whose unhappy task it was to teach us an elegant, 18th century dance. We brought it off, just fine, but the choreographer needed frequent smoking breaks and never looked happy.

Another occasion, rehearsing the Christmas madrigal dinners, Nat asked if anyone knew a trombone player as they wanted a jester to get sounds from a cardboard tube. This resulted in a fabulous gig for my, then 12 year old son, who as well as acting got to eat a full English roast dinner, on stage in costume every night!

During act 3 of Der Rosenklavier the children shouting 'Papa' were not making enough sound, so, (this time, there was no asking) it was 'you three', you're going to be children, for this part!

He was my favorite director; the operas came alive, under his direction and he made sure (by spending most of the first blocking rehearsal, talking about the opera) that we had a deep understanding of what we were performing.

My condolences to his wife Pamela, (Louise died in 1998) and his children and grandchildren.

Sue Field

This article caught the attention of Linda Noble Brown

The Computer Becomes a Singing Coach

Posted to Speech Technology Magazine, 21 July 2008

Singing lessons could come courtesy of your PC after news that Israeli researchers have successfully managed to train a computer not only to rate the pitch of a singer's voice, but also to coach him to improve his technique.

Until now, vibrato—the pulsating change of pitch in a singer's voice that gives expression to songs—could only be judged subjectively by voice experts. Researchers from Tel Aviv University, however, have created a program that rates the vibrato quality of a singer's voice, and then helps him improve it with an application based on biofeedback.

The development is already creating a stir. Introduced at an international competition in Istanbul, Turkey, it won first prize at the International Cultural and Academic Meeting of Engineering Students.

Vibrato is an essential element in how a singer expresses a song. It is created by a steady pulsating change of pitch, and is used extensively by both classical opera singers and pop stars.

The Tel Aviv University application, which was developed by a team of researchers led by Noam Amir, a senior lecturer from the Department of Communication Disorders at the Sackler Faculty of Medicine, can teach singers how to mimic the vibrato qualities most attractive to the human ear.

Amir began exploring the qualities of vibrato three years ago when he and his team decided to look for an objective, numerical assessment of the musical effect. New vocal students usually don't have good control of their vibrato, explains Amir. "Their vibrato is erratic and hard to judge subjectively, and it's hard to find a precise measure for this.

We wanted to find a way to emulate a human expert in a computer program."

Amir's team input many recordings by students singing vibrato into a computer and then had their vibrato judged by human teachers. Using hundreds of vocal students and expert judges, the team was able to use mathematical measurements to correlate vibrato styles to their quality, as judged by the teachers.

In the wake of this, the computer was able to rate the vibrato quality of new voices on its own, producing ratings similar to those given by the expert vocal teachers. In effect, the computer "learned" how to judge the quality of an individual singer's vibrato. The researchers then added a biofeedback loop and a monitor so that singers could see and augment their vibrato in real time.

Mastering vibrato, however, is no instant guarantee of success. "Vibrato is just one aspect of a singer's impact," admits Amir, an expert in the way that emotions are expressed in speech. "Singers need to arouse an emotional response, and that is a complicated task."

And here is Linda's response

This is too funny. This is a fine example of why scientists are not artists. The fact is that vibrato is due to a natural function of the muscles -- whenever a muscle is tasked, it passes the tension quickly back and forth between muscle groups. Consider when you have to hold a heavy object, and after a time your arm starts to shake. Same process as vibrato.

If a singer "creates" a vibrato, they usually manufacture a false vibrato by pulsation of the abdominal muscles. This is not the same as vibrato, which is located in the vocal apparatus. However, the vibrato can be evened out and made more pleasant with consistent breath pressure, which means finding a dynamic equilibrium between the efforts of the intercostal muscles and the vocalis muscles (vocal cords).

But even that does not mean that the vibrato is consistent! In a trained singer, it fluctuates with the emotional response. The more intense the emotion, generally the quicker a vibrato will respond, the more relaxed, the slower. The actual rate of vibrato, however, is dependent on the percentage balance of the varying types of muscle fibers located in the larynx (which you are born with -- that's why some people have a naturally quick vibrato -- think French coloraturas, and others have a wider and slower vibrato, as in a Wagnerian soprano).

All of this, however, is only a small piece of the puzzle! By having singers focus on one abstract aspect of singing, this computer program would have to, in effect, force them to make light of all the myriad other aspects of singing -- which are so much more important! I noticed this same effect when I visited the (then new) vocal computer lab at Belmont University in Nashville. I didn't see that their singers were any better for it, or progressed any faster, and when I tried out all the bells and whistles myself I found that I spent more time trying to manipulate the programs than paying attention to my voice. For instance, I sang into a microphone and had my vowels assessed by the computer. No matter how hard I tried, I could not make my vowels match up exactly to the computer's idea of "perfect". However, when I let go and just sang the way I know how, the other voice teachers watching were amazed at the absolute consistency of my vowels -- all just a bit off from the computer's "perfect".

I don't think I have to worry about losing my job to a computer. . . . :)

Linda Noble Brown

Anything you would like to add?

Materials for Newsletter Publication

should be sent **electronically** to:

joshuaianelder@hotmail.com

Deadline: October 20

NATS Newsletter

San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
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