

Abuse of Power in the Vocal World

Napoleon and Other Small Men

There are so many abuses of power in the vocal world by so many people that one hardly knows where to begin. My old voice teacher, Olga Ryss, believed that conductors were the worst abusers in the singing world. In her thick Russian accent, she would say: “Put a baton into the hand of a little inadequate weasel of a man with very few real qualifications and very little talent for music, much less conducting, and, suddenly, he thinks he is Napoleon!” (She had learned some very descriptive words in the English language. Most of them were applied to conductors at one time or another!) Of course, she was the first to admit a fantastic conductor is the greatest gift to singers. The problem is that great conductors are so rare.

Exploitation

Exploitation can happen to anyone in any business if the person in a position of power has no morals or character. However, we are concerned with abuses that mostly apply to singers and singing. We will try to stay close to our main theme and discuss some of the ways singers are abused, and in many cases, ruined by people who, because of their power in the vocal world or in the singer’s home, use their positions

as a means to exploit talent and ambition for their own purposes.

Willing Victims

Singers are willing to do almost anything asked of them in order to have even the possibility of a performance opportunity. After years of study, untold hours of practice, commitment, hopes, dreams and extreme sacrifices, including money, relationships, pride, and time, the need to perform and, finally, to earn a living, can put the vocal artist in a very vulnerable position. Anyone who comes along with a little power to hire or assist a career can use some young singers in any way that pleases his or her fancy. Stories come out of Hollywood of exploitation and abuse of young actors and entertainers. Somehow, this is expected and accepted as normal in the movie business. Why should people be surprised if the same systematic abuse of young singers exists? Of course, the singers are not always innocent. Certain forms of exploitation require cooperation between both parties. Beautiful young people can use their individual assets and advantages to enter into a consensual exchange of abuse. However, abuse by singers, who are willing to exploit any resource available to them, may not always be directed towards the conductor or director. Some forms of abuse are often directed at other singers who create an atmosphere of competition through genuine vocal talent. A gorgeous young soprano can eliminate competition, imagined or real, by using her physical beauty to her advantage: A word to her conductor or director/friend can eliminate the physically less well-endowed, even if the homely ones may have much better voices. In many instances, the singers in other vocal

categories will suffer also, because the judges who choose the winner of a competition or who have the power to hire and fire may decide that a gorgeous soprano's (or tenor's) appearance is more important than any vocal consideration.

The Social Agenda

Many times the secret to successful auditioning is to identify strongly, either politically or ethnically, with a strong social agenda. There is no doubt, if a singer is representing or identified with a individual group that is in vogue at the time of the competition, his or her 'political identity' will be a huge advantage to him/her. I have judged hundreds of auditions and competitions, and have found that the best talents are often demonstrated by the winners of second, third, and fourth place. The first place winner happens to fulfill the prejudicial criteria of the majority of the judges. And, in spite of violent arguments among supposedly qualified people, the majority of the votes cast may fall in favor of a singer who is the 'compromise' candidate. In such a situation, a mediocre voice can get the contestant a first place win.

Offering career opportunities to the best looking candidates is, at least realistic, because the advantage of being beautiful helps the career all along the way. One of the main things young singers should understand is that the priorities are seldom purely artistic. It often happens the first place winner of a competition never fulfills his/her career aspirations. The ethnic or social considerations lose importance when it comes time for an opera company to actually cast a difficult operatic role. Being the conductor's best friend will not help a young singer to manage the difficulties of singing the role of **Aida!**

Vocal Criteria

Perhaps everyone should have to audition behind a screen. Many orchestras are following this procedure when auditioning new instrumentalists. The abuse would have to stop if the only criterion were the best voice. And how is “the best voice” defined? The criteria were very clear when Sir Rudolf Bing was the manager of the Metropolitan Opera. A singer had to demonstrate beauty of tone, sufficient volume for the role, enough stamina to finish a performance with vigor and competency, and be able to fulfill the musical criteria established by the composer. These criteria included the necessary vocal range, from the highest notes to the lowest notes, stamina, amplitude and projection without the aid of a sound-enhancement system, the ability to sing a full dynamic range from very loud to very soft, staccati, martellati, trills, coloratura, and never to sing with a nasal color in the voice. Singers were expected to be able to express happiness, sadness, nostalgia, determination, wistfulness, and any other color of expression demanded by the text and the music in several different languages. Nasality, caused by incorrect placement of the voice, permits only one color of expression (“timbro) in the voice. The possibility of the full declamation of the text of a role and the colors of the vocal expression demanded by the music and text becomes impossible to fulfill if the voice is placed in the nose. Caruso warned in his book to “Never sing into the nasal cavity. It is against all the rules of song.” Imagine an actor or actress placing the speaking voice in the nose and trying to express love or sadness or joy. Every word and every sound would be identically nasal in quality and lack the necessary variety of true expressive colors.

Whims and Opinions

Singers find themselves succeeding or failing because of criteria based on the whim of a director, a conductor or an agent. This is also true in the movie business. It has become popular among movie directors to use 'Jesus Christ' as a constantly repeated curse word, even when a curse word is not called for in the script. Directors demand the actors whisper their lines to each other, even from thirty feet away and in a noisy environment. It is absurd to expect the fellow actor being addressed to hear what is being said when the audience is unable hear the words at all. And the music in the background is often much louder than the whispered dialogue. Directors who allow whispering in situations that call for loud, clear speech are ruining the careers of countless actors by not allowing the vitality and charisma of the actor to be expressed through the voice. The energy of the leading character no longer comes across without a lot of mugging and grimacing. We seem to be slowly returning to the style of acting that was common in the old silent movies. Why do the directors want this or allow it? It is impossible to understand.

“...claiming his own right of conscience.”

No one speaks at the soft level of a whisper to another person who is thirty feet away. Nor does a person necessarily speak in a whisper every time he or she is close to someone. It is truly ridiculous! And who decided to eliminate the voice as a tool of expression? Are directors suddenly experts on the human voice? Are they qualified to evaluate an actor's voice or a singer's presentation: many important artists'

representatives (agents) and directors know nothing about the voice or how it should be used to best effect. They are often lawyers or businessmen who have never had a voice lesson. Yet, they occupy a position that allows them to decide who will have a career and who will not. Mahatma Gandhi said: **“Everyone is claiming his own right of conscience without having practiced the discipline and that is why there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world.”** Everyone who hears a singer’s voice or an actor’s speaking voice has his or her own opinion: “...I think it is too bright,” “...Well, I think it is too dark.” “...Oh, I find it too narrow.” “...It is obviously not focused enough.” And most of these ‘experts’ have never sung or studied singing or acting! In Gandhi’s words, they have never ‘practiced the discipline’. However, they never miss an opportunity to claim their right to express an opinion (their ‘right of conscience’). Again, this can become abuse if the aspiring young performer is emotionally susceptible and listens to unqualified opinions.

“The Voice Becomes Flesh”

I heard Peter O’Toole in an interview discussing advice for young actors. One of the questions to Mr. O’Toole was: “What is the most important consideration today, do you think, for young actors who wish to become successful actors and actresses?” The answer was totally unexpected, but revealed the secret of this great actor’s success.

“The most important consideration for a young aspiring actor should be to cultivate the voice. The voice expresses the feelings of the actor and interprets the character like no other form of communication. Actors should think and study and practice endlessly to make the voice become ‘flesh’.

Breathiness or shallowness of the voice removes the ‘flesh’ of the actor and the ‘flesh’ of the character to be portrayed. When I was a young actor, there were no stars without great voices. Call it talent or awareness or technique, the greatest, most successful actors seemed to emit the voice from the deepest corner of their souls.

Abusers and ‘Abusees’

The General Director/Artistic Director of the Connecticut Opera, George Osbourne, heard Pamela Kordan sing the aria *Una voce poco fa* from Rossini’s **Il Barbiere di Siviglia** and found it to be, to quote him exactly, “...the best performance of that aria he had ever heard”. He swooned and fawned and raved ecstatically about her fantastic voice, perfect coloratura and gorgeous physical appearance. His opinion of the singer was as positive as it could have been. But did he hire her? No! He said quite openly that he would not hire anyone who was not recommended by the Lombardo Artists’ Management in New York. It was amazing to realize that the General Director/Artistic Director of an opera company would not trust his own ears and aesthetic sensibility to hire a singer from a different stable. He admitted he did not want to get blackballed by agents upon whom he had grown to depend for ‘artistic guidance’. Was this a form of abuse? I think so. In this case, the agency was abusing the Director of the opera company by fostering the threat, imagined or not, of exclusion. The Director was abusing young talent by not having the courage of his own convictions. And who was the ultimate ‘abusee’ in this vicious circle of abusers? The singer!

Aesthetic Awareness?

A friend of mine was judging the first round of a major voice competition with two other gentlemen. They listened for many days without hearing one great voice. My friend was getting very bored when finally a young woman walked into the room and sang *Dich Theure Halle* from Wagner's **Tannhaeuser**. My friend was thrilled to be able to recommend a great voice for the next round of the competition. However, his fellow judges did not agree because of the way the young lady was dressed! Her clothes did not look glamorous and, in their opinion, she obviously lacked a sense of 'aesthetic awareness'. Their decision was firm and no amount of pleading would move them. Logical arguments did not help. Perhaps she could not afford better clothes. It would have been possible to consult a fashion expert to improve the choice of clothes, for instance, if funds were available. Winning a money prize in a competition would provide her with the funds she needed to dress well in the future. The result was the young soprano did not advance to the next round. The personal prejudices of even one of the judges can be the deciding factor. There can always be subjective considerations, having nothing to do with Art that influence the decisions made by the judges of a competition. As Abraham Lincoln said: "You can please some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time."

Obesity and the Voice

Another consideration that pervades the thinking of judges or those who have the responsibility to hire and fire is obesity. We don't mean very large people who are tall with huge chests. We mean fat people whose appearance is dominated by their weight. Judges of competitions and agents cannot understand why a singer must be overweight. Fat can be lost and weight controlled by diet and exercise. Any singer who appears at an audition and is noticeably overweight can be rejected, even if the voice is a spectacular one. The exceptions have been singers who represent themselves to be in possession of Wagnerian voices, or tenors with great natural voices who sing beautifully. Tenors are so rare that compromises may be made by the judges.

Size Matters (of the Voice!)

The psychology is that large bodies are required to produce large voices. However, we know that this is not always the case. Birgit Nilsson was not a large woman at 5' 8" and 165 lbs, nor was Kirsten Flagstad at 5'10" and 175 lbs. Rosa Ponselle was 5'7" and weighed 139 lbs, and Caruso was 5' 9" and weighed 179 lbs in 1908 (age 35) at the height of his career. Some singers are very large people without being obese. Lauritz Melchior was 6'6" and weighed 350 lbs. Leo Slezak was 6'9" and weighed 380 lbs. Clara Butt was 6'4" and, although we have no record of her actual weight, we know she had a very beautiful figure. She also had the most powerful contralto voice in history.

Many of the singers we consider to be obese were not so at the beginning of their careers. Pavarotti was a soccer player and tennis player when he was young. If a young singer is overweight and wants to win competitions and get hired, the very best advice is to get on a serious diet/exercise program and lose the excess fat. And the exercises should be limited to those that are the best for singers....Yoga, Tai Chi, Tae Kwon Do, swimming, and long walks while doing breathing exercises. Begin now! Don't wait until later. Later will be too late!

It seems to be acceptable to be a small person or a large person as long as excess weight is not overwhelming the visual presentation. It is the visible fat that is rejected by judges in auditions. Can this be another form abuse? Yes! The true opera fans care only about the voice, especially in big theaters over full orchestras. If a singer is slender and has a great voice, that is wonderful. But if the choice has to be made between the obese singer with the great voice and the beauty with the mediocre voice, the fans will go for the better voice every time. Agents and directors of opera companies abuse the loyalty of fans every time they put their own prejudices first. Sir Rudolf Bing understood this. If he had a noticeable prejudice during his tenure at the Met, it was his tendency to engage the most powerful, most beautiful voices in the world! The fans loved him for it. The great voices he hired did not always come in slender, beautiful bodies!

“Voce, Voce, Voce”

One of the most important agents in Vienna blamed the Americans for creating a cult atmosphere of youth and beauty

in the opera. European agents had to accept the ‘new criteria’ in order to represent their clients internationally. The particular agent mentioned above was convinced, in terms of business opportunities for himself and his young clients, that looks and youth, not voice, had become the criteria in the world of classical singing. He searched anxiously for the next star among the youngest singers he could find (he thought the age of 19 was about the ideal age for beginning a career). This was a new form of abuse directed against ‘older singers’ that had not existed in the past. Rossini, when asked to list the three most important things required in order to make a big career in opera, responded with an answer that clearly defined the criteria for two hundred years. He said: ...“Voce, voce, e voce”(voice, voice, and voice).

Abuse by Teachers

Another form of abuse we should discuss occurs under the direction of some of the most trusted, important people in our lives: voice teachers, coaches, acting teachers, and the aforementioned agents. All of these people are supposed to be dedicated to the success of their students or clients.

Since the National Association of Teachers of Singing (N.A.T.S.) decided that for a voice teacher to make a contract with a singer is unethical, teachers have made their livings by being paid for individual voice lessons. The same situation, being paid by the session, applies to other mentors in our pursuit of artistic excellence. This means, that instead of a teacher teaching a student for no immediate remuneration and getting a percentage of the singers earnings for life, if the singer made a career, the singer would pay the teacher’s fee up front on a per lesson basis during the study period only.

Therefore, the more lessons a teacher teaches overall, the more money he/she earns. So, it makes perfect sense for a teacher who considers money the most important thing of all to extend the instruction period for as long as possible. One student was sent to me in New York who had studied with the same coach for twelve years without ever having auditioned for anyone! Was this a form of abuse? Most definitely! By the way, the 'student' made her professional debut in Germany 11/2 years later!

Teacher Economics

There are basically two approaches to making a living as a voice teacher: the first is to keep the singer in the studio for as many years as possible, which extends the teacher's earning period. The other possibility, which I always practiced, is for the teacher to work as hard and as quickly as possible with each student. The goal is for the student to learn the complex set of vocal requirements necessary for a professional career. The sooner this can be accomplished, the better. Overall, the intense teaching method is much cheaper for the student. The process can be learned in three years instead of six (or twelve!). If a student finishes early and can get out into the world and win competitions and get a career started, the word gets out and the teacher gets to be very well known. That way, the singer is happy and not abused or exploited. The teacher can make a living because of the increase in the number of new students who want lessons as the successes of the regular students become known. This approach is more difficult and requires that the teacher be able to produce professional quality students who win competitions and get hired in the shortest amount of time.

Everything depends on a private teacher's positive reputation among young singers, in spite of the kind of jealous criticism that emanates from the studios of teachers whose students have never won a competition or received a contract to sing professionally. A private teacher who isn't political or social, who is without connections, and who depends entirely on knowledge and proof of that knowledge, is the best teacher for young singers who aspire to a professional career. Such a teacher has to know his/her stuff or he/she will have no students.

'Passing the Buck'

I've had singers leave my studio and go to a 'politically connected teacher' after winning every major competition in the world or making a successful Metropolitan Opera debut while using what they had learned in my studio. Some of them had vocal damage when they came to me and had to study with me for five or six years to correct faulty techniques and breathing habits. The teacher who accepts a talented student, who has already proven the validity of his/her vocal approach by winning competitions and getting professional contracts, should not try to change the student's vocal technique. It invariably ends up a vocal and career disaster for the student who changes. The new teacher can always blame the failure of the 'new approach' on the previous technique (although the singer had experienced only success and vocal health using it), or simply say, when there is an unpleasant result caused by the new method, "The student isn't doing anything I told her/him to do." Of course, the vocal problems experienced by the formerly successful singer are caused by the concepts being learned in the new

technique. ‘Passing the buck’ (blaming the student) is one of the major abusive methods in use today among teachers whose students are in constant vocal trouble or who never win a competition or get hired to do a professional role.

Changing Horses in the Middle of the Stream

A private teacher does not receive a salary from an institution and has no security except his/her success as a teacher, or he/she must have ‘connections’. Some private teachers are so connected to a powerful person that students study in their studios seeking connections to that same powerful person. Of course, it will still be necessary to sing well, if the opportunity to sing for the powerful person ever presents itself. Usually, by the time an opportunity occurs, and, unfortunately, it rarely does, it is too late. The ‘new technique’, learned from a ‘connected’ teacher who was never a successful singer, has done its damage. It has become impossible for the confused student to sing well. Unfortunately, the successful vocal method learned from the previous gets lost in the confusion of learning a new, and, obviously, faulty approach to voice production.

Careers End When Vocal Troubles Begin

A teacher, who accepts a new student whose vocal technique has been successful, and then changes a student’s singing technique, is guilty of abuse. A student who has already won competitions, and/or has been hired as a professional singer while using their previously established vocal approach, and has no vocal fatigue or other problems, should be encouraged

to continue singing with that method. The new, 'political' teacher knows very well that the student is studying with him/her only to exploit the rumored political connections supposedly available to the student. It is a fraudulent student trying to fool a fraudulent teacher. A truly talented, intelligent singer, who has already developed a great technique before the fraud begins, recognizes immediately the 'connected' teacher knows nothing about singing. Usually, the new teacher has never been a singer. The gift of gab and a glib approach can impress young singers who haven't as yet learned how to sing. The most amazing thing is the way young singers who sing beautifully and have a marvelous vocal technique allow a teacher who teaches everything wrong to totally destroy their ability to sing. Such abuse occurs on a regular basis. Careers end when vocal troubles begin.

The Secret Studio

Whenever a singer comes to me from another studio, I will not accept her/him as a student if they are singing well and have no tension or physical problems in the throat. When I first started teaching in New York, I often taught students who studied with politically connected teachers. My teaching of these desperate singers who suffered from constant hoarseness or vocal fatigue or nodules on their vocal cords had to be done secretly, lest the singer offend the agent who was supporting the 'politically connected' teacher. The young singer could find himself or herself dropped from the agent's roster as a client. This is again an example of abuse by agents and teachers. Requiring a singer to study with a particular teacher is not the role of an agent. If an agent drops a singer

from the roster because of a change of teachers, it is a severe form of abuse. No agent can know what a singer feels in the throat when he/she sings. The decision to study with a teacher has to be made by the singer, even if it turns out to be a mistake. In any case, any honest teacher will tell a singer if it isn't working out the way it should, and will not allow a terrific young singer to be coerced into his/her studio.

The Family Crucible

The most damaging form of abuse is emotional or psychological, exercised by the person closest to the singer. Very often it is the spouse or lover. Husbands and wives have ruined more careers than all of the other abusers put together. One negative word from the person loved by the singer can be devastating. Giovanni Lamperti wrote that "One word can destroy a singer." The vulnerability of the singer can easily be exploited if the spouse has a selfish agenda to impose. For whatever reason, spouses are often the agents of destruction in a situation where one spouse or partner is more talented than the other. You would think that the less talented or less intelligent spouse would understand that whatever is good for the singer, in terms of success, connections, money and fame, would be good for her/him. Unfortunately, jealousy is the green-eyed monster which feeds on the erosion of the greater talent in a close relationship. As "Tosca" sings in her great aria, "Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore," (I have lived for Art. I have lived for Love.), Art must come first if the Artist is to survive. Singers should observe that in the life of a prima donna or any super-talented singer, Art must come first. Love is a close second, but must never come before Art unless the loved one is

totally supportive in every way. Tenors are the most emotionally vulnerable of all types of singers. The stories of the greatest ones are very interesting in the light of this subject.

An Unbearable Life Style?

Richard Tucker's wife would leave him alone on performance days, and would always answer the telephone in order to protect the great tenor's voice and 'mind-set' for the evening's requirements. She would 'bar the door', so to speak, and make certain that her famous husband was not disturbed.

Music critics and members of the public often criticized Mario Del Monaco's over-protective wife. She would not allow people to approach Del Monaco and speak to him without her permission. He was never seen alone on performance days. His 'lady warrior' was always hanging on her husband's arm. The great tenor was treated like a king by the closest person in his life.

Franco Corelli's took food with him from Italy when he traveled to singing engagements. Apparently he was fanatical about what he ate and would only eat food imported from Italy that was cooked by his wife. She was another protective wife whose life was dedicated to the well being of her husband.

Enrico Caruso, as an example of how to survive in the middle of one of the greatest careers ever made by any singer, spent years alone, speaking only to servants, with no one close to

him. He spent his days working with his coin and stamp collections.

Helge Roswaenge was divorced eight times. He said none of his wives could stand being the wife of a famous singer. He refused to change his life style to accommodate them and they were unable to adjust to his. His way of dealing with his private life, although unbearable for his wives, must have been good for his career. He sang for fifty-five years without a vocal problem.

Quarrelsome Mates

An angry, contentious, suffering wife will destroy a male singer if he stays married to her and tries to survive the selfishness of his spouse. This is especially true of tenors. Proverbs 21:9 says: “It is better to live in a corner of an attic than to live in a wide house with a quarrelsome woman”. And, of course, the same applies to a quarrelsome, contentious, angry man. The rule here is to avoid any and all emotional situations that move the thought processes from the singing brain cells to the emotional or defensive brain cells. Coping with sustained disapproval and criticism from a spouse will totally destroy any singer. It is the worst and most destructive form of abuse because there is no defense against it. The loved one has access to the deepest feelings of the vulnerable singer. If those feelings are abused or criticized or questioned or constantly need defending, the singer’s career will soon be over. And once the defenses are penetrated, they will completely dissolve and cannot be restored, even if the singer removes himself/herself from the abusive situation. As I look back over a fifty-two year career

in vocal music as singer, teacher, conductor, repertoire coach and stage director, I realize I have personally witnessed enough sadness and ruination of singers to write an entire book on the subject.

Close the Portals

Examples of abuse in the singing business are myriad and unfortunate. The elimination of abuse will probably never happen. Singers must be aware that abuse exists and decide to what extent they are willing to cooperate with it. Hopefully, each singer will find the limit of his/her willingness to play emotional games before the protective walls surrounding the Psyche are breached and the mental and emotional organization required for great singing is lost. Mary Baker Eddy, in her book, “Science and Health” said: “Close the portals of the mind and do not allow any negative thought to enter in.”

Energy Vampires

The various ways energy can be drained from a person are discussed at length in the book, The Celestine Prophecy by James Redfield. There is a long section devoted to the ‘energy vampires’ (a phrase coined by me and not by Mr. Redfield) we encounter in our every day lives. Everyone needs energy. Where do we find it? We are supposed to absorb it from Nature. Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. Mostly, we suck it away from other people. Singers who find themselves involved with an ‘energy vampire’ will soon realize that the mental and emotional organization required for great singing will soon disappear if steps are not taken to

eliminate the problem. A singer who has to constantly defend himself or explain himself will soon be unable to perform. One of the most destructive methods used to breach the mental defenses of a singer is to constantly question or dispute every idea or decision a singer makes. Usually, it begins at the simplest level: The choice of a dish on a menu, the choice of a restaurant, telling the children to take a shower. Every possible thought the singer may have is, for some inexplicable reason, open for discussion, dispute, condescension or criticism. Normal sexual relations begin to suffer, too, as the hard and relentless attack method causes the singer to live in a perpetual defensive state of mind. And, after having every idea and decision questioned in his/her everyday life, the singer is supposed to walk out on the stage and, ignoring the basic doubt that has developed in her/ his mind, exude self-confidence and sing beautifully as if his/her way of approaching things were perfect. Once the ability to make instantaneous, indisputable decisions without having to defend them has been lost, the performances will gradually deteriorate into evenings of desperate survival until the singer's talent is finally perverted and destroyed psychologically and emotionally.

“...Run Like Hell!”

Mario Lanza made a movie called Serenade about a fabulous young tenor who gets involved with a woman who constantly tries to ‘improve’ him. His background was that of a poor person. The woman he loves is an educated person from a highly social, wealthy family. He is constantly reminded of his innate inferiority, in spite of his phenomenal talent (which, ironically, makes him the ‘chosen one’ among the

elite crowd. that surrounds his lady friend). Of course, as a result of the incessant barrage of condescending questions and advice, directed toward his taste, his dress, his family's lack of education and social standing, he soon loses the deep self-confidence that motivated him to sing and become a performer in the first place. His ability to sing begins to suffer until it disappears in a fog of self-doubt. Every singer should read The Celestine Prophecy and watch the movie, Serenade. At the first sign of disapproval of the singer or lack of respect for the psychological state of the performer by a lover or spouse, the targeted artist, to quote Olga Ryss, "...should pick up his/her legs and run like hell!"

"I Couldn't Laugh Anymore"

This is easier said than done. What if children are involved? There are no good answers or solutions unless the spouse doing the criticizing understands the damage being done by the manifestations of her/his all-pervasive Ego, leading to a total breakdown of the singer's ability to organize his/her singing with the ebullience necessary. One singer, when asked why he couldn't sing the way he had sung at the beginning of his career, answered, "I lost my ability to be happy. I couldn't laugh anymore."

What can the end be? How does the doubt-inducer suppose things will turn out in the end if the undermining of the self-confidence of the singer is destroyed? And we must ask ourselves, is destruction of the singer the true desire of the attacker? If so, why?

The 'Digestion of Abuse'

E.E. Cummings wrote in his great poem, “Olaf in the Army,” a line that can be applied to the limitation of any form of abuse. After endless abuse at the hands of his military superiors, he finally can’t take it anymore. He refuses to obey the last demeaning order given to him by an officer and is immediately sentenced to death by firing squad. As he is preparing to die, an officer asks him why he didn’t obey the order. He would have been able to continue living. Olaf answers the question with great energy and conviction and a rediscovered self-esteem. The last line of the poem reads, “There is some shit I will not eat!”

Perhaps Olaf’s use of language would not be the way we would express our frustration as singers. The point made by E. E. Cummings was clear, however, and we must all draw the line according to our own level of ‘digestion of abuse’. How much abuse is each singer willing to ‘eat’? The answer to that question is, and will remain, the most important consideration in the life of a singer. Most singers can deal with criticism from professionals in the artistic world. However, if the home life is not emotionally healthy and supportive, the end of the ability to sing becomes a matter of when, not if.

Of course, the ideal answer to the question, ‘How much abuse should a singer be willing to ‘eat’?’, should be **‘NONE’!** Waiting too long to resist emotional abuse, trying to sympathetically understand the reasons and logic which motivate repeated attacks, searching for ways to ‘improve oneself’ in the eyes of another, defending oneself constantly against false accusations or misconstrued motivations or

personal decisions, having every opinion or suggestion criticized or doubted, and too much acceptance of criticism and trying to please everyone but the singer himself or herself will devastate the most promising career.

The Armor of Doubtless Self-Love

We have discussed the negative power of abuse. Consider positive power as it applies to singers. It is energy that demands no compensation or accommodation by the singer in an important relationship that can be personal or professional. A deliberate decision must be made, by the singer and everyone around him/her, that will permit the emission of a stream of ‘doubtless sound’. A ‘doubtless sound’ is a tone produced without the slightest hint of doubt in the mind of the singer. The singer must be supported in his/her need to live the ‘doubtless life’ as far as singing is concerned. Very often singers, especially tenors, seem to be conceited and not objective in the assessment of their voices and performances. This psychological state is essential if the singer is going to ‘stand and deliver in a doubtless way’. There is absolutely no room for doubt in that ‘instant of decision’ which organizes the entire body/mind process to produce the singing tone. That means there is no room for accommodation on the part of the singer. The audience, conductor, colleague and every ambient entity must, in that moment, accommodate the singer. The energy required to ‘be in control’ cannot be shared in that moment. It can be, depending on the individual artist and the difficulty of the music, subtle or stark, gentle or harsh. Any of the precious energy needed for singing and performing that is drained away in order to counteract negativity emanating from a close

partner can be ruinous. The best survivors seem to be the singers with the biggest Egos. Some singers are so ridiculous in their conceit that they are considered to be like clowns or idiots. However, they are often the longest survivors and enjoy long careers, because nothing distracting or disturbing can penetrate their armor of self-love! We must all learn to defend ourselves, unfortunately, because attacks and criticisms will occur. If we can anticipate a problem, we often can avoid it. Let the smart singers be aware and beware. Stay away from the ‘energy vampires’. They will suck you dry if you are susceptible. A singer needs an endless supply of energy for career. Others in need may attempt to take this personal energy supply from the singer, if it is available to them. Any singer who expects to make a career must understand that he/she will need all of his/her energy available in order to sustain the rigors and demands of the career.

Martial Arts

It is good to study a Martial Art to learn how to tap into one’s own personal energy source, called ‘Qi’ or ‘Chi’ in Chinese, and ‘Ki’ in Korean and Japanese. The word is often combined with other words that are familiar to us in the U.S. such as ‘Tai Chi’ (Chinese), Hapkido (Japanese), or Aikido (Japanese). One might ask, “What possible use can fighting have in a singing career?” The answer is that singers don’t need to fight, but, as Alfred Einstein said, “Everything is energy”. And no one needs an endless supply of emotional and physical energy more than a singer! But what kind of energy does a singer need? Energy, as understood in Martial Arts, is not the burning of calories or the strain of muscles. It

is rather the kind of energy that makes the heart beat. It is the life force itself. Scientists call it bioelectric' energy. Singers can exploit the miracle of 'Chi' if they are willing to practice exercises that have been developed in the fighting Arts of the Far East. Although originally discovered by warriors and taught to young recruits in the various armies of the different countries over hundreds of years, the main benefit of 'Chi' for singers is that it provides endless energy, health, confidence, and emotional invulnerability to the person who gains the knowledge and use of it.

'Chi' will not only prevent fatigue and illness, it will help the singer to avoid falling prey to the 'vampires' and egomaniacs and emotional 'black holes' that try to suck energy at every opportunity.

The Journey

Singers should be prepared to deal with any problem, either technical or emotional, that may arise as a result of abuse. We have listed here some of the forms of abuse that may occur along the way. We have even discussed a physical method that will help us survive the seemingly limitless number of problems that can occur in the life of a singer. Let's hope this list and the warnings included in this article will aid singers in their quest for fulfillment of their talent and potential.