

Sing Your Life Newsletter - April, 2003

I want to talk to you this month about your performances. This is a subject upon which I have spoken before many times. But I have found that once a singer has established firmly the singing fundamentals that are given in "A Voice For A Lifetime in 30 Days", and is ready to start performing regularly, a strange thing begins to occur. The progress made in the learning process of the correct way to produce sound, seems to slow to a crawl.

This occurrence happens to almost every one of my students who consider that they have mastered the principles of singing; which are breathing, creating the sound, using all the body's resonation chambers, supporting tone with the diaphragm, and avoiding the Seven Deadly Sins of Singing. What seems to occur is that the singer, having successfully made the transition between the drills and the songs, is singing correctly, but without **truth**, and without **real expression of self!**

Singing is NOT performing! I've said this before, but let's analyze exactly what is meant by this statement. When we are learning how to sing correctly, we may move from just doing the exercises to singing familiar and favorite tunes while applying the fundamentals we are learning. This is good, for since we are programming the body's cell and muscle memory patterns, we **MUST** use the principles of singing in the actual singing of a song. But something else **MUST** eventually occur in order to be a performer.

And that something is **expression of self**, or **feeling**. So do you get it? How do you express your feelings?

Well, every single one of us has parts of our personality or character that we hide from others. **Everybody** does this! And when we come up against any of these parts that we wish to hide from others, we back off. How many times have you been in a conversation with another individual and somewhere in the course of your conversation, you evoke a memory that's uncomfortable. You may not even consciously be aware of what it is, only that you have a brief moment of fear and desire to flee! For instance, it could be that you are innocently petting a dog in the park, and suddenly you have a flash of a memory that is uncomfortable. You smile at the dog's owner and leave as soon as you can. And you don't think about what just happened, because the moment you are *away*, the discomfort leaves you, and goes back down into the place where you hide things.

Now, when this discomfort shows itself while you are performing; maybe the lyrics stir up something from your past that bothers you somehow, you will compensate for your discomfort by **ACTING!** This is the very worst thing you can do! For when you begin to **ACT** during a performance of a song, you have stopped *expressing* and stopped **communicating** with your audience.

Remember when I told you that performing takes courage? I wasn't speaking about the courage to stand in front of an audience and sing. That can be learned and as you build your confidence in your abilities, it gets easier and easier. No! I am speaking of the courage it takes to ALLOW your hidden fears and discomforts to SHOW to an audience!

When I was a student at the High School of Music and Art in NYC, I considered myself quite clumsy, and although I was very talented vocally, I never tried out for any school productions that required dancing because I was afraid being humiliated at the auditions by not being able to dance very well or even fake it by being graceful. I missed out on many a role that I could have probably been great on because of my fear. Later on in college, I continued to play it safe, but singing with a small band in a club with a small stage that limited my movements. This way I could disguise the fact that I thought of myself as homely and clumsy and I could just SING. I even put off getting contact lenses for years because I did not wish to see the audience. Peoples' comments on my performances were, "You sing so well. We enjoyed it." "You have a great voice". "Your range is exceptional!" "You have great pipes."

It's interesting that no one back then ever commented on how my performance made them *feel*. It wasn't until my 30's that I discovered something quite by accident. I was singing in a Dinner Theater in Arizona, and was given a medley of songs to perform by the musical director. The medley consisted of 3 songs about Rhythm, "I Got Rhythm", "Fascinating' Rhythm", and "Crazy Rhythm". I had told the musical director that I really didn't think I could pull off this medley and asked that it be given to one of the other singers. "No way!" he said. "You are the best singer in the house. Why wouldn't you want to do it?" I reluctantly admitted to being too clumsy to sing about rhythm. He laughed and said, "I thought you'd know by now that a pro takes a deficit and turns it into an asset. Do it as camp! Make it funny!"

This one medley changed my entire view of myself and my performance and when I finally did perform the songs, I purposely and exaggeratedly stepped all over my own feet, and had the crowd in the palm of my hand. They roared with approval, and I learned that by revealing something that I had tried to hide for years, I was more accepted than ever before. As the customers filed out of the theater that night, they said things like, "You made us feel as if we have known you forever", "You are so expressive, and we just love you!" "We're going to bring all our friends to see you".

So what IS it that you don't want to show? Do you have the courage to reveal it? To an audience? Dig down and search the corners of your psyche, singers! Don't be afraid! Because, when you take that mike, **THAT** is the time and place when you can SAFELY be YOU, warts and all!