

From February, 2005 newsletter to my singers:

RECORDING and "LIVE" PERFORMANCE

I've often said that I'd rather sing in front of 100,000 people than spend a single hour in a recording studio. My problem is that without someone to "talk" to, I can only hear the flaws in my voice through the earphones.

It's true that when you perform "live", your audience can see you, the expressions on your face, your smile, your frown, the way your body moves, and many vocal "flaws" go unnoticed, if not by you, the performer, at least by the listeners.

Not so with a recording. Since the listener cannot see the singer, every note matters, and even more than that, the meaning and feeling of the lyric must be felt through the recording.

I had occasion to be one of 3 judges for a singing contest a studio in Florida was conducting last year.

I listened to about 600 singers, each singing one song that were on 30 CD's which were sent to me by the contest producers. They gave me 2 weeks to listen to all 600 entries and complete score sheets for each singer. The single thread that seemed to flow through each entry was the lack of sufficient expression to keep me interested in more than just the initial few seconds.

But as a judge, I HAD to listen to the whole song. It was at times a truly excruciating experience, and yet it infused me with a new way to impart to you singers the value of understanding, feeling, and communicating the words of your songs to your listeners.

It's just not enough...NOT ENOUGH to have a pretty voice! You must make your listener BELIEVE what you are saying...yes...on stage, but even MORE so in a recording.

You must REVEAL your essence through your song....your soul, your joys and sorrows, your beauty and your ugliness...ALL of who you are. And I will say it again...until you understand, singers!

**DO NOT BE SO IMPRESSED BY THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN VOICE!
BE GRATEFUL FOR THE GIFT AND USE IT TO THE BENEFIT OF EVERYONE
WHO HEARS YOU SING!**

In other words, as Ralph Waldo Emerson so eloquently put it, "Get your bloated self out of your own way and let your light shine into the world."

Now let's talk about Perspective...

What is perspective anyway?

It's a way of looking at something. And the way we look at a situation, a person, or anything really, determines how we act toward it, right?

Sometimes we get locked in to our particular perspective and can easily

become inflexible in our individual point of view about things.

Now, whenever I get rattled or so scattered by projects that I can't think straight I decide to stop, breathe, and do something totally unrelated to the task in front of me.

For me, a very relaxing activity is playing a game on my computer. I have over 100 games on my hard drive which I play when I need to focus...to draw in my energies and get the overwhelming "to-do" thoughts out of my head.

Now many of these games are very difficult, and require great concentration.

Today, I was having particular trouble solving one of the games. I had been on it for about 30 minutes when the telephone rang. I had to stop and take the call.

When I returned to my computer screen, I saw the whole board in a totally new way, and was able to solve the puzzle in a few seconds. What had just occurred was that I CHANGED my perspective!

In performing a song, I believe it's necessary to focus on the right things, and to me those right things are the quality of your communication rather than the sound of your voice. You've heard me say it innumerable times that you need to touch your audience and let them into WHO YOU ARE as an artist.

Even an absolutely perfect voice can leave your audiences cold if they can't FEEL who you are inside.

So whether you're recording a demo or an EP to sell on iTunes, or singing at a restaurant or club, or recital, or talent show, you must always keep in mind that your talent is NOT of your own creation...it's a gift to be shared with others. So share it freely and humbly, from your heart, not your ego, singers!

And on that note...I'd like to re-print an article I came upon on the famous Broadway legend

Elaine Stritch...mainly I guess so that you understand, that although, I don't always subscribe to the mainstream vocal teaching methods by any stretch, I have a lot of company when it comes to interpretation.

Critic's Notebook

A Broadway Legend's Lessons for Singers

By ANTHONY TOMMASINI

During Ms. Stritch's tireless performance on Tuesday, with 16 songs woven into an engagingly rambling monologue about her bittersweet life in the theater and her midcareer struggle for sobriety, I, found her

gritty vocal artistry an object lesson. Opera singers in particular could learn something from "At Home at the Carlyle," which runs through Feb. 4, two days after Ms. Stritch's 81st birthday.

To point to the gravelly-voiced Ms. Stritch as a vocal role model might seem a stretch. She is no Barbara Cook, a rich-toned singer with consummate technique who gives regular master classes in the interpretation of musical theater songs to voice majors at the Juilliard School. As Ms. Cook approaches her 80th birthday in October 2007, she continues to sing with miraculous elegance and, if anything, even greater depth. She will perform at the Metropolitan Opera House on Jan. 20.

Ms. Stritch, even in her youth, was a brassy belter who was tapped as the understudy to Ethel Merman in "Call Me Madam" in 1950. By 1970, when she appeared in the original production of Stephen Sondheim's "Company," Ms. Stritch had secured her place in Broadway history with a raspy account of "The Ladies Who Lunch." In this song, her character, Joanne, bitterly toasts the bored, bitchy and moneyed New York ladies, herself included, who swap histories of husbands over too many martinis.

What is remarkable about Ms. Stritch's singing these days has little to do with the quality of her vocalism. Her sound may be raw and patchy, her pitch may be approximate, but her cabaret show is a vivid reminder that, in essence, song is musicalized speech.

Words come first in her artistry. She knows how to put lyrics across, how to deliver a song.

In the ruminative "I Think I Like You" (music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse), you sense Ms. Stritch pondering her feelings with each new phrase, as if searching for the words to express them at that moment.

Her silences between phrases - when she holds a thought and hardly moves - are riveting...making the silences as gripping as the arrestingly sung phrases.

Opera singers, who can become obsessed with technique, should read the letters of Mozart, who was always directing singers in his operas to "think carefully of the meaning and force of the words."

For a demonstration of what Mozart was talking about, go hear Ms. Stritch sing "Why Him?" (music by Burton Lane, lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner).

In this wistfully amusing song, the singer wonders why she fell for the man she loves, who on the surface would seem to be nothing special.

"Where he should be he isn't thin. Why him?" she sings in one sweet lyric. Ms. Stritch performed the song in memory of her husband, the actor John Bay, and naturally her emotion infused her singing. But only a savvy actress and vocal artist could make "Why Him?" seem so spontaneous and true.

If Ms. Stritch does not have much voice left, she certainly has a whole range of expressively weathered vocal inflections. Sometimes, capping a song with a sustained high note, as in Rodgers and Hart's "He Was Too Good to Me," she sort of shouted the top note and defiantly thrust a hand in the air, as if to say, "You get the idea." It was easy for the audience to fill in what was missing.