

# The Singer's Library: The Enduring Legacy of Late, Great Pedagogues

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH

New posthumously published books allow the pedagogy of two beloved teachers to live on.



## **T**he Essentials of CoreSinging

Meribeth Dayme (1938-2019) was a singer and voice teacher who split her career between the United States and Europe. Born in North Carolina, where she later studied music at Salem College, she earned graduate degrees in music at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and the University of Southern California. Her pedagogical lineage includes earning a PhD as one of the last students of William Vennard, whose book *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic* was a foundational text in the field. Dayme's own book, *The Dynamics of the Singing Voice* (1982), continues to enjoy a well-established following and provided a first introduction of her work to a wider audience.

Dayme's accomplishments are numerous. She was a tenured professor at the University of Delaware and a National Institute of Health postdoctoral fellow at the Royal College of Surgeons in London. It was after winning the Van L. Lawrence Fellowship in 2001 that she founded her own approach to singing and voice pedagogy, CoreSinging. This is the subject of her latest, posthumously released book, *The Essentials of CoreSinging: A Joyful Approach to Singing and Voice Pedagogy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022). The book, co-edited by Cynthia Vaughn and Matthew Hoch, is a compilation of Dayme's course materials on the CoreSinging approach, taken from both in-person and online classes.

The “core” of Dayme's approach is described in Part I of the book, “The Elements of CoreSinging.” These 68 pages present the philosophies at the heart of her method. Hoch points out in his editorial remarks that Dayme was one of the only scholars of her stature to have pursued certain subjects that were “not necessarily in line with the values of the establishment.” These elements are immediately apparent and may raise some eyebrows, as Dayme discusses chakras, energy fields, and higher consciousness—subjects not generally covered in most traditional voice pedagogy texts.

It would be difficult to summarize these elements here in a way that does justice to the substance of her approach. Instead, this quote from Dayme gives a glimpse into the intended outcome of her work: “We can restore the balance of art, science, and performance by including concepts of energy in learning and teaching. Balanced singers and teachers become healers by their connection to the world around them. This is what the CoreSinging approach is all about.”

A compilation of additional “selected writings” from Dayme appear in Part III, including a “little book” on how singers can “get ahead fast,” an essay on creating confidence, a reprint of a previously published interview with Dayme conducted by Vaughn, and even an unpublished poem from 1986.

Some of the more engaging sections of the book are found in Part II, “Case Studies: Practical Application of

CoreSinging.” These guest-authored chapters provide reflections from several of Dayme’s former students. Here, readers can learn how Dayme’s pedagogy and personality influenced a generation of voice teachers in a way that continues to be put into practice in studios the world over. Of particular note is Rachel Velarde’s chapter, “Why CoreSinging?,” which shows how she has translated and implemented specific techniques, ideas, and philosophies she learned from Dayme into her own teaching. Velarde’s writing reflects the inquisitive mind of a curious student and brilliant pedagogue in her own right while she provides apt examples of how teachers and mentors plant seeds of influence (sometimes unknowingly) that last for years beyond the moment.

As with every book promoting a specific method or approach to singing, readers will absorb and implement certain philosophies, dismiss others, and choose still others to ruminate on and perhaps return to later, when they may hold different meanings. In this vein, *The Essentials of CoreSinging* offers a tremendous amount of worthwhile material for those willing to explore the ideas held within.

To be certain, not every reader will be drawn to every detail on every page. But, as Dayme herself encourages, “Teachers love to experiment with new ideas; they sometimes need to give themselves permission.”

### *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*

Barbara M. Doscher was professor of music at the University of Colorado–Boulder, where she previously earned an MM in Voice Performance and a DMA in Voice Performance and Pedagogy. It was also at CU where she was both student and colleague of Berton Coffin, whom she described as a “dear friend, patient mentor, and beloved teacher.” Doscher reportedly sat in on Coffin’s vocal pedagogy course four times at CU before taking the reins of the program after his retirement. The topics of Coffin’s numerous books range from historical pedagogy to phonetic readings of songs and arias to *Coffin’s Sounds of Singing* with its famous chromatic vowel chart.

The first edition of her own book, *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*, was published in 1988, which was followed by a second edition in 1994. The new, posthumous reissuing of the same text (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023) includes an introduction by John Nix, noted singer, pedagogue, and voice researcher who is also Doscher’s former student. He provides comments on the content of the book while also contributing updates based on broader and deeper understanding of certain topics that have emerged since the book’s last publication.

As Nix points out, Doscher did not include vocal exercises in the book, reflecting its purpose as a “singing voice function book” and not a method book. Although it covers individual aspects of function (respiration, anatomy



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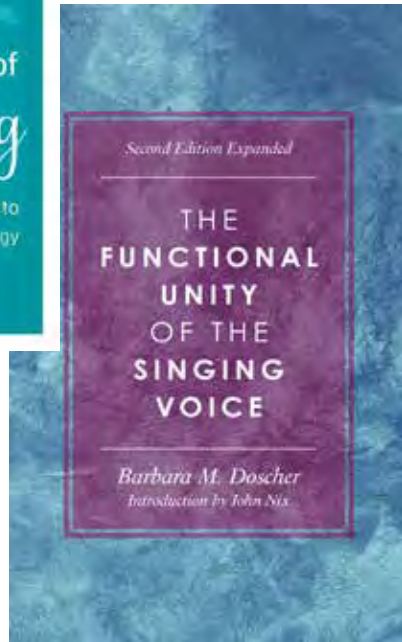
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of the larynx, vocal registers, etc.), Nix describes the crux of the book as the understanding that “in practice they must all be considered parts of a whole which resides in a feeling, thinking human being.” This sentiment is made clear in the final chapter, titled “The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice: A Gestalt.” There Doscher emphasizes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that the singing mechanism “can function correctly only when all of its components are working together.”

Besides Nix’s introduction, the other major addition to the book is a series of reflections from several of Doscher’s former students and colleagues. They offer observations on the effectiveness of specific techniques; remarks on her kind, encouraging approach; and remembered quotes and memories that have stuck with them over the years as testaments to Doscher’s impact.

Perhaps surprising for a text that was first written 35 years ago, much of the book holds up remarkably well. The areas that may seem dated or limited in application to modern readers (for instance, it is clearly written through a Western classical lens) are given appropriate context or clarification by Nix. Otherwise, the greater content is as useful to readers now as it must have been to readers in the previous century. For those already familiar with the book, the additions in this expanded version are worth exploring. For those with no previous exposure to her work, the reissuing of Doscher’s text provides information that is useful, practical, and timeless.

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Nix points out an additional significance of Doscher's text, calling it "an authoritative book written by a successful female American pedagogue at a time when American pedagogy was male dominated." As such, he states, it "served as a light to guide other female pedagogues who followed." Nix credits Dayme as being a crucial part of that same lineage, with *Dynamics of the Singing Voice* preceding Doscher's book and *The Essentials of Core Singing* following it.

It can be difficult to determine what a successful legacy is for teachers. For some, it may come in the form of an idea, discovery, or unique bit of information that can be passed on to succeeding generations. For others, their legacy may be the tally of careers influenced, lives touched, and souls inspired. Meribeth Dayme and Barbara Doscher were lucky enough to leave both behind. The first is evidenced by the two titles highlighted here. Proof of the second is seen in the dedicated former students and colleagues whose efforts continue to keep the work of their mentors relevant while also making it accessible to an entirely new audience.

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