

Brian Manternach, Associate Editor

The Value of Performing

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FOR THOSE OF US WHO TEACH in private studios, it is easy to make our own performing a distant, secondary concern as our schedules fill up. Naturally, if the majority of our income comes from teaching, a performance opportunity that takes us out of town for an extended period of time must be more or less financially equal to the lost income of missed lessons. Even performing locally may involve evening and weekend rehearsals that can interfere with prime teaching times.

While many college and university professors—especially those in tenure track teaching positions—have an expectation or contractual obligation to continue performing, they generally also receive support from their employer to do so. For out-of-town engagements, they often are allotted travel funds and allowed time off from teaching responsibilities. If they wish to give a recital, they are likely given free access to a collaborative pianist, a performance venue, programs, advertising, etc. Unaffiliated private teachers, on the other hand, may have to dig into their own pockets to pay for these expenses, making it difficult to justify from an economic standpoint.

Even if performing is not monetarily valuable, however, it can still benefit our teaching. And if performances are not extensive or planned at regular intervals, there are many advantages to maintaining an active presence as a performer.

Teachers who perform may be better able to demonstrate the techniques they are encouraging their students to build. While vocal modeling can be a contentious issue—some teachers believe it should either never be done or be done only sparingly—it is another tool that teachers can have at the ready if they are active performers. In my graduate studies, I specifically sought out teachers who had voice types similar to mine, knowing that hearing and watching them demonstrate often was worth the proverbial thousand words in getting the point across.

Teachers who perform must maintain a regimen of vocalization that keeps their own instruments flexible, pliable, and healthy. Even when there are no immediate engagements on the horizon, keeping the voice in performance shape will allow teachers to jump in as last minute substitutes when area performers call in sick. With little notice, I have been asked to step in for ailing church soloists and even to sing *Messiah* solos with a local orchestra and chorus when a scheduled singer was unable to perform.

Teachers who perform have the ability to thoroughly learn new repertoire. Of course, we can learn repertoire through score study and by assigning new songs to our students and working through them together. But it is

Journal of Singing, March/April 2017
Volume 73, No. 4, pp. 425–427
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difficult to replicate the level of detail that is brought to song preparation if those songs are to be performed. Even the performance itself often lends insights to a piece that may be difficult to uncover through score study alone. A past professor once told me, “Never judge a piece of music until you have performed it.” On more than one occasion, I have brought songs to a performance with some trepidation, unsure how they would “play” before an audience, only to be told later that they were some of the more intriguing songs on the program. Teachers who do not perform may be quick to dismiss music if an initial reading indicates the songs may be unsatisfactory.

Teachers who perform can empathize with their students who experience music performance anxiety (MPA). In a recent article on the topic, Lynn Holding logically infers that performance stressors may change over a lifetime.¹ Rather than allowing MPA to be the impetus to forgo performing, teachers can find new, more effective coping and management strategies. In this way, by continuing to confront the anxiety that comes with performing, teachers can speak with students from their current experience rather than relying on, “Back when I used to perform . . .”

Teachers who perform can bring first hand knowledge of age related voice changes to their studios. Having learned to manage our own constantly changing instruments over the decades, we can again bring a unique understanding of these challenges to our adult students as they pass their own vocal milestones.

Teachers who perform have additional opportunities to network and build relationships with other musicians. In a previous column, Kari Ragan identified performing as a way for private studio teachers to stay connected to other professionals and to foster collegial relationships. As she describes, “it is easy to become so focused on the business of running a private voice studio that the performance aspect of our career is neglected. Continuing to create performance opportunities will encourage teachers to further their own voice pedagogy, broaden their musical experience, and collaborate further.”²

To be sure, success as a performer does not ensure equal success as a voice teacher. Similarly, being a successful voice teacher does not necessarily hinge on whether or not a teacher continues to perform. Certainly, there are many fine instructors who have

either retired from public performing or never pursued active performing careers in the first place. Therefore, performing is by no means a prerequisite for high quality teaching.

However, for those teachers who do continue to perform, there may be even further benefits to our students. I recall an experience from elementary school when my piano teacher decided to retire. She ended her final studio recital by putting herself on the program and playing for us. She told us that it was the first time she had ever played on one of her student recitals before and said how nervous she was to play. As a young student, I remember feeling surprised that my teacher would feel nervous to perform—just like I did. And, though I have no recollection what piece she played, I remember being awed by her performance and feeling proud that she was my teacher.

Continuing to perform—even in small venues, even only occasionally—allows us another way to teach our students. We demonstrate our willingness to continue putting ourselves through the same anxiety inducing experiences that we expect our students to endure. We can provide a model of how our passions can continually be put into practice. And we show our students that, by continually learning, we are students, too.

NOTES

1. Lynn Holding, “Music Performance Anxiety,” *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 1 (September/October 2016): 83–90.
2. Kari Ragan, “The Connected Voice Teacher,” *Journal of Singing* 67, no. 1 (September/October 2010): 67–71.

Brian Manternach, tenor, is on the voice faculty of the University of Utah’s Department of Theatre, maintains a private studio, and serves as president of the Northern Utah Chapter of NATS. His students have been cast in professional productions in the US and abroad and have earned top honors in vocal competitions from the local to international levels.

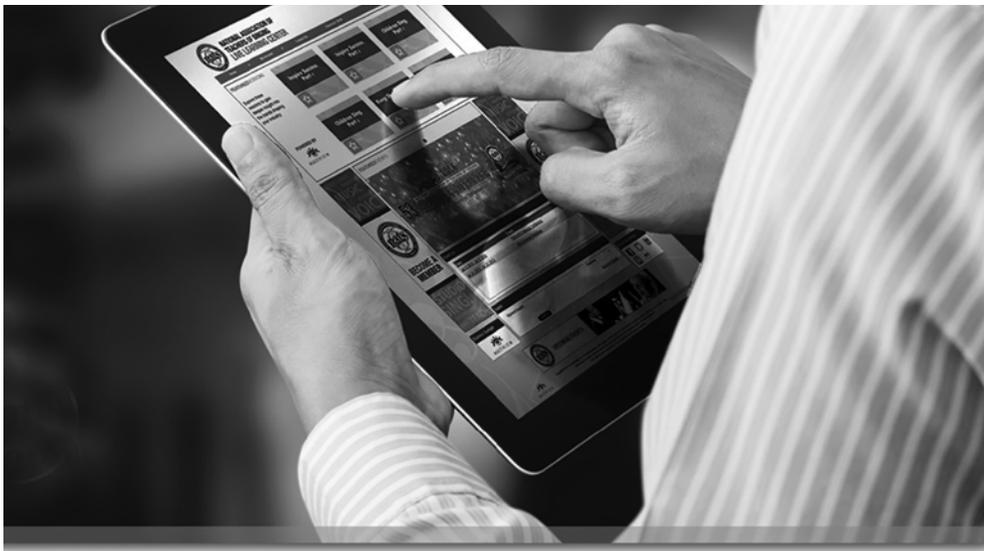
Brian was the recipient of the 2016 Voice Pedagogy Award from the NATS Foundation and has given lectures for the National Center for Voice and Speech, the University of Utah Voice Disorders Center, and TEDxSaltLakeCity; he also presented a poster paper at the 54th NATS National Conference.

An Associate Editor of the *Journal of Singing*, he also authors “The Singer’s Library” book review column for *Classical Singer* magazine.

Manternach has made solo appearances with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Cleveland Chamber Symphony, among others, and

his stage credits range from Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* to Miles Gloriosus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* to Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Sankt Anton, Austria). For two seasons, he served as apprentice-artist at the Skylight Opera Theatre in Milwaukee.

Originally from Iowa, his degrees in voice performance include a BA from St. John's University/College of St. Benedict of Minnesota, an MM from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and a DM from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. He has also completed all three levels of training offered by the CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute at Shenandoah Conservatory.



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