

# The Singer's Library:

## The *So You Want to Sing* Series Concludes

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH

The final book of the *So You Want to Sing* series is complete. Learn more about cabaret singing, as well as the other offerings in the *So You Want to Sing* series.

After seven years and 20 books, the *So You Want to Sing* series is now complete. Produced by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) under the purview of Executive Editor Allen Henderson, the series has a stated intention of helping singers, students of singing, and teachers of singing easily navigate various genres of music by providing a complete survey of what it means to sing within each of those genres.

Karen Hall was tapped to serve as both the first series editor and the author of its inaugural book, *So You Want to Sing Music Theater*. In a 2014 interview for *Classical Singer*, Hall acknowledged that the project was a significant undertaking that would inevitably go through growing pains as it evolved. But she also believed the series would strengthen as more authors became involved and shared their own expertise. "It's a good start that's going to get a lot better," she said.

Matthew Hoch, who took over as series editor with the fourth book, has brought the project to its conclusion with the publication of the final book, *So You Want to Sing Cabaret*, by David Sabella and Sue Matsuki (reviewed below). In this interview, Hoch discusses how the series progressed from its first volumes to its last. He also reveals that although the project has wrapped up for now, it is far from finished.



Matthew Hoch



David Sabella



Sue Matsuki

photo by Eric Stephen Jacobs

**When you took over as series editor, did you have any reservations about joining a project that was already underway? What did you hope you could bring to the series?**

Taking over the editorship of an existing series of course raised a lot of questions. I didn't want to be "locked in" to the preferences of my predecessor and wanted to ensure that I had ample opportunity to shape the series moving forward. I also wasn't sure of the level of artistic directorship I would have since I was going to be serving two masters—the publisher and NATS.

Fortunately, Bennett Graff, who was the associate acquisitions editor at Rowman & Littlefield at the time, and Allen Henderson, executive director of NATS, were magnanimous with the latitude I was given as the series editor. While negotiation, consensus, and compromise were of course part of the process, I was encouraged by both of them to "dream big," which represented an exciting opportunity.

A major part of my job was to conceive new titles and recruit the right authors for them—so the future was, in many ways, a giant blank slate. Seventeen books later, I am proud of the work we accomplished together.

**Did you find that significant changes occurred from the first through the twentieth books, or did the underlying mission remain relatively consistent throughout?**

A guiding principle of the *So You Want to Sing* series is to provide teachers and students of singing resources to expand beyond art song, opera, and concert music, which is how many of us were formally trained. Allen Henderson's vision was to give singers and singing teachers who came from this background the necessary tools to venture outside of their comfort zone.

We never strayed from that mission, but as time went by we found new ways to be creative within the marketing of the series. While early titles focused on genres, the scope of the series expanded with titles like *So You Want to Sing for a Lifetime*, *So You Want to Sing Music by Women*, and *So You Want to Sing with Awareness*.

**As thorough as the series is, there are also some omissions, given the impossibility of covering every existing genre. For instance, there are no volumes specifically dedicated to pop, R&B, metal, or rap. How did you make the difficult decisions about which genres to include?**

Those are certainly some good ideas, and perhaps these titles or others will come to fruition at some point. Since we're working with a commercial publisher, sometimes excellent proposals need to be reimaged simply due to marketing considerations.

We try to develop creative solutions to accommodate as many genres as possible. For example, rather than devoting an entire book to Gregorian chant or contemporary Christian music, we developed an edited volume titled

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## Review: *So You Want to Sing Cabaret*

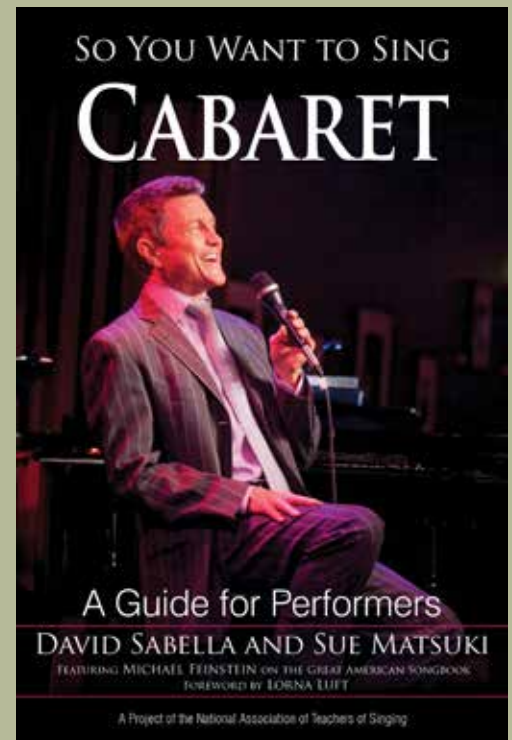
As revealed in the book's Introduction, the target audience of *So You Want to Sing Cabaret* is both aspiring cabaret singers and their teachers. Authors David Sabella and Sue Matsuki set out with the goals of dispelling misconceptions surrounding the genre and providing understanding of the nature of the art, craft, and business of cabaret performance. To accomplish this, they divide the main content of the book into six sections: Cabaret 101, Singing in Cabaret, The Craft of Cabaret, The Business of Cabaret, The Royal Family of Cabaret: Interviews, and The Future of Cabaret.

Throughout the book, readers are warned against one of the most common pitfalls of the genre: "over-singing the lyric." The authors define this as "any type of sound that calls attention to itself, where one may find oneself listening to the tone quality of the voice rather than to the lyric and storytelling." They argue that this practice harms artistic communication by saying to the audience, "Don't look at me, just listen to the sound of my beautiful voice"—a tactic entirely antithetical to the intimacy required in cabaret.

To supplement their own chapters, Sabella and Matsuki invited more than 30 guests from all aspects of the business (performers, publicists, directors, etc.) to contribute to the book, either through interviews or guest-written chapters. This allows them to present a multitude of multifaceted perspectives on the genre. One question that comes up in nearly every interview in one form or another is "What would you ask voice teachers to spend more time on in the studio with their singers?" As a NATS-sponsored series, the question is so obvious, and yet I cannot remember an instance in the previous volumes where it has been asked this directly or this often. I found myself looking forward to the responses to the question each time it came up.

Series editor Matthew Hoch has often expressed how much care and research went into deciding who to invite to serve as the authors of each book. After all, who is expert enough to summarize the entirety of one genre, including its history, style, performance practices, and necessary vocal techniques? When it comes to cabaret, Sabella and Matsuki are eminently qualified, as even a brief perusal of their biographies reveals. Even so, they followed their cabaret-informed instincts as storytellers by welcoming diverse perspectives from dozens of invited contributors in order to tell a more complete story of the genre.

The result is an engaging page-turner that reads much more quickly than its 450 pages might indicate. *So You Want to Sing Cabaret* is a fitting volume to bring this far-reaching, first-of-its-kind set to its appropriate conclusion, sending the series out on a high note.



*So You Want to Sing Sacred Music*. The proposal process is quite involved and, in the end, a lot of compromises and hard choices must be made to balance the interests of all parties involved in the decision-making process.

### **What is the plan for the series now? Will there be forthcoming second editions? Will it expand beyond 20 books?**

In the short term, we are focusing our energy on second editions of selected titles. The first of these will launch in June of this year with a revised and expanded edition of *So You Want to Sing Musical Theatre* by Amanda Flynn. There are also several other second editions that we are in the early stages of planning. There are no immediate plans to expand beyond 20 books, but don't think we would ever say "never" to the possibility of developing new titles if the right concept came along.

### **For decades, NATS was presumed by many to be the National Association of Teachers of "Classical" Singing. Do you think that the *So You Want to Sing* series, with its focus on such a variety of musical genres, has had a part in changing that perception?**

Old reputations die hard, but I think that NATS has made extraordinary strides under Allen's leadership in this regard. Over the past several decades, NATS has come a long way in embracing diverse styles. This is one of the major themes in *So You Want to Sing CCM*, which focuses on the courageous pioneers who first ventured outside of the world of classical voice pedagogy.

NATS auditions now have musical theatre and commercial music categories, and conference programs are exploring a wide variety of genres and styles through presentations and workshops. The *So You Want to Sing* series is only one of a variety of important initiatives on this front.



Brian Manternach

### What do you hope will be the legacy of the *So You Want to Sing* series?

When people look back on these books in 10, 20, or 30 years, I think the series will point to a time in the history of voice pedagogy that marked a turning point toward functional training that empowers singers to approach any genre or style of music in a healthy, technically sound way. All books inevitably become dated over time, but this series encapsulates where we were as a profession during this pivotal time.

In the short term, however, it gives me fulfillment that teachers and students of singing have access to this robust phalanx of 20 books for their pedagogical arsenal. I wish I would have had a comprehensive resource like the *So You Want to Sing* series when I was beginning my career and am pleased to have been a part of its creation.

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