



The Singer's Library: Telling Secrets—Crucial Clues for Constructing a Career

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH

In Voice Secrets: 100 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Singer, authors Matthew Hoch and Linda Lister uncover the essential elements of building success as a singer.

It can sometimes feel overwhelming to consider just how much information singers have to know. Besides simply building a free and expressive technique, they are expected to have a thorough understanding of vocal terminology, style, repertoire, and performance considerations as well as the practical side of launching and sustaining a career.

In order to help singers identify the breadth of topics where their personal knowledge may be lacking (in other words, to “know what they don’t know”), Matthew Hoch and Linda Lister have spelled out 100 performance strategies in their new publication from Rowman & Littlefield, *Voice Secrets: 100 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Singer*.

In my conversation with the authors, they discuss their collaborative project, how they

decided which topics were most important to include, and how the book may best be used.

The first pages of the latest installment in the *Music Secrets for the Advanced Musician* series by Rowman & Littlefield define advanced musicians as “those who have moved far beyond what beginners and intermediate practitioners need.” How do you define “advanced singer” for this book? What age group or ability level is the target audience?

Matthew Hoch: When you write for a series, you are kind of stuck with the title/subtitle that the publisher gives you. We smile a bit at “secrets” as well—a lot of these topics aren’t really secrets at all, just good common sense techniques. All that said, I think we tried to find topics that would be helpful to students of a variety of levels.

The undergraduate student will probably be able to digest a good deal of information presented here, but we hope that more advanced performers will also find some things that they can take away or that are helpful reminders. I find that I work on the same issues with singers of all levels. Once in a while, I have a lesson (at the age of 40), and the coach or teacher still comments on breathing, resonance, vowel adjustments, diction, etc.—the same things that I address with my students on a daily basis.

Linda Lister: As Matt said, these aren’t really secrets, of course; they are more like tidbits or quick tips to help singers on specific issues. Think of Lamperti’s maxims of *Vocal Wisdom* combined with *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (by Stephen R. Covey), plus 93. I see the target audience

Linda Lister



photo by Maryann Bates

as advanced undergraduate singers preparing to audition for graduate school and Young Artist Programs—but some secrets can help singers from freshmen to young professionals. I know I learned things I didn't know about barbershop and Finnish diction from secrets that Matt penned.

You write in the Preface that the book emphasizes breadth over depth, which allowed you to include more topics. In the Epilogue, you write that you had to hold yourselves back from adding one more secret or making one last point. Knowing that you couldn't go too in-depth, how did you decide when to say "enough is enough" and move on?

MH: Oh, we could have kept going very easily! I think our original proposal had 92 secrets, which then turned into 94, 96, and 99. . . . Just before we turned in the final manuscript, I sent Linda an email expressing anxiety that we forgot about light opera, at which point she said, "OK, let's have 100 secrets, but then we have to stop!" Just like singing, at some point you have to shut up. In my introduction,

I cite Valéry's famous quotation that "poems are never finished . . . they are abandoned." Books are like that too.

LL: Overall, I pictured students in the practice room pulling out the book to help with a performance strategy they could employ directly and quickly. Therefore, succinctness was important to me. Instead of engaging in protracted pedagogical philosophies, I wanted to provide practical tools for immediate implementation. And yes, I told Matt we had to stop at 100, or soon we'd be at 200!

Since you are co-authors, how did you divide the writing between the two of you?

MH: One of the reasons why I loved collaborating with Linda on this project is because of how well we complement one another. We're

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both singing teachers but have completely different angles and research interests. Linda's background made her ideal to write about stage direction, acting, bodywork, and dietary/health topics (to list only a few of her many areas of expertise), and I generally took topics related to voice science, literature, diction, and choral music. She thought of essay topics that I never would have dreamed of, like how to sing with braces!

We tried to divide the work 50/50, but then read over each other's shoulders and made suggestions for revisions. I thought it was an extraordinary partnership—a very enjoyable and efficient collaboration.

LL: Matt has extensive experience in vocology—an area beyond my purview—plus a triple major in music theory, [vocal performance, and music education] as an undergrad and a double major in music history [and vocal performance] in his master's degree. So he already commands knowledge of so many areas to cover. As an opera director and yogini, it was fun sharing my ideas to round out the book. As Matt said, the work was divided pretty equally, but the last few secrets we wrote were the most collaborative. And Matt suggested some secrets for me to write

that I hadn't thought of including, such as "Managing Your Finances." My father, a diehard *Forbes* magazine subscriber, will be proud!

You chose to use a more casual tone in the book, which often reads more like a conversation than a textbook and keeps it from getting too heavily academic. Why did you decide to go that route?

MH: That, too, is one of the intentions of the series. Linda especially had a real knack for it—she came up with many of the more clever secret titles. Somewhere between an academic journal and *Entertainment Tonight* was the right tone for this book—at least that's what we were aiming for.

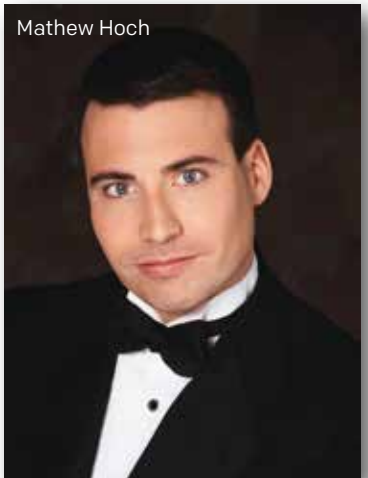
LL: I was aiming for the clever writing style of *Entertainment Weekly*. Our goal was to keep the book informative but accessible and entertaining. Hopefully the laidback tone prevents people from being intimidated by potentially daunting topics such as "Singing in Russian" or "Competing without Defeating Yourself."

The diversity of topics included is quite astounding. In keeping it to 100 secrets, what were some topics that you had to exclude in favor of others?

MH: Genres were probably one major area where we had to restrain ourselves. For instance, the secret devoted to performing opera or familiarizing oneself with world music—talk about broad topics crammed into two or three pages! Either of these could have been books in and of themselves. But there was only so much room, and decisions had to be made. We were actually over our word limit, but they published what we wrote anyway.

LL: Matt wrote secrets about exploring languages and literature off the beaten path of the "big four" standards (Italian/French/German/English) that could have been expanded to separate essays on Nordic song, Czech, Portuguese, etc. In the end, we ended up expanding the section on business tips the most, which made sense since this is an area that often doesn't get covered within a collegiate curriculum.

Though you do include a chapter on contemporary commercial music (CCM) topics, you admit that the



Mathew Hoch

The book cover features a photograph of a woman in a red top and a man in a light blue shirt in a music rehearsal room. The woman is standing and looking towards the man, who is seated at a piano and looking at sheet music. The title 'ARTISTRY in Performance and Teaching' is overlaid in large, bold, purple letters. Below the title, there is a list of graduate programs and contact information for Nazareth College.

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book has a "classical bias." However, while CCM singers may be less interested in the sections on French mélodie or singing oratorio, it seems the majority of topics covered are applicable to both classical and CCM singers. Did you hope that most topics would be this widely applicable?

MH: I think that Linda and I both have a sincere appreciation for CCM styles, but at the end of the day we recognize that we are classically trained and full-time classical singing teachers at NASM-accredited programs. Since many of our colleagues teach music theater and CCM styles full time, we humbly offer our insights on these genres while also deferring to their expertise. I think that we have so much to learn from

each other, and it doesn't benefit our students to ignore the CCM world altogether. In the 21st century, it is important to be as knowledgeable and well-rounded as possible.

LL: Matt is absolutely on point here. Many of our students cross over into different CCM styles because of their love of the genres, and some may find rewarding creative and employment opportunities in varying styles of singing. As someone who first started singing in musical theatre, I hope the book appeals to future Kristin Chenoweths and Carrie Underwoods as much as it does to future Deborah Voigts.



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Book Review

The title of the book, *Voice Secrets: 100 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Singer*, may conjure images of closed-door studio teachers closely guarding their techniques and methods lest they be subjected to any outside scrutiny.

However, authors Matthew Hoch and Linda Lister take quite the opposite approach as they generously share useful information and practical perspectives while providing an extensive list of sources that much of the information came from.

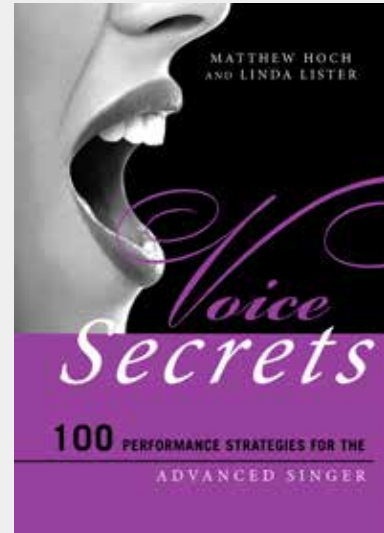
The 100 "secrets" (technically there are 101) cover a myriad of topics and are explored in short essays, most of which are two pages long. The format, reminiscent of Richard Miller's *On the Art of Singing* and *Solutions for Singers*, introduces the key elements of each topic while the lengthy bibliography points to reliable sources for further exploration.

Arranged into nine chapters, the book surveys vocal tech-

nique, musicianship, vocal health, practice strategies, language and diction, singing classical genres, singing CCM, stage presence, and business tips.

Addressed to the "advanced singer," the authors assume readers will have a degree of familiarity with the subject matter. For instance, the term "glottis" is used without first being defined and the IPA symbols are incorporated long before the chapter devoted to IPA. Naturally, given the wide array of topics, some sections will undoubtedly serve as review while other sections will explore less familiar areas.

The volume is not intended to exhaustively examine any one realm, which is in keeping with the parameters of the *Music Secrets for the Advanced Musician* series. Within this framework, however, the authors do a wonderful job of providing the most important bits of information on a comprehensive list of subjects. There is much



here for the advanced singer to ponder, with new ideas alongside fresh approaches to previously learned material. The addition of the detailed bibliography simply ensures that *Voice Secrets: 100 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Singer* will be frequently revisited.

—Brian Manternach

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The book runs into the same issue as Matthew's first book, *A Dictionary for the Modern Singer*, in that there is not a unified terminology among voice pedagogues. What was your philosophy for addressing potentially contentious terms like head voice, chest voice, and mixed register?

MH: As you know, coming together as professionals on terminology is one of my great passions and research interests. It is a topic that I will continue to work on and advocate for as my career continues to move forward. You mention the registration chapter—I think that is one of the longest ones in the book for precisely the reason you mention: there are so many ways to name a rose! Mode 1, TA-dominant, chest, modal . . . I tried to discuss all of these labels in that essay.

There is much work to be done. In fact, my Auburn colleague Mary Sandage and I are currently working on a terminology paper that we will present at PAVA [Pan-American Vocology Association] this fall that recommends a unified terminology for singing teachers, voice scientists, SLPs, and other professionals. It might be an idealistic dream, but my hope is that we can get there someday.

LL: Matt wrote the section on registration, and no doubt it was a daunting task to discuss such a complex issue within the secret's few pages. I thought he did a good job of including many types of terminology so that something would eventually "click" with the reader's experience.

Is there anything else you'd like readers to know about the book?

MH: I just want to mention that this was a very fun project to work on! It didn't even seem like work. And Linda was such a great co-author—I am grateful to have had this opportunity to work with her on this book and I hope that people enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

LL: Matt was a great co-author, too. He epitomized "Secret 89: Be a Gracious Collaborator." Whether the reader wants to learn more about VoceVista or Ujjayi breathing, it is my hope that the book provides a springboard to learning and becoming a more confident singer.

Tenor Brian Manternach teaches voice at the University of Utah in the Musical Theatre Program. He holds degrees in vocal performance from Saint John's University in Minnesota (BA), the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (MM), and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music (DM). He can be reached at bmantern@gmail.com. ©

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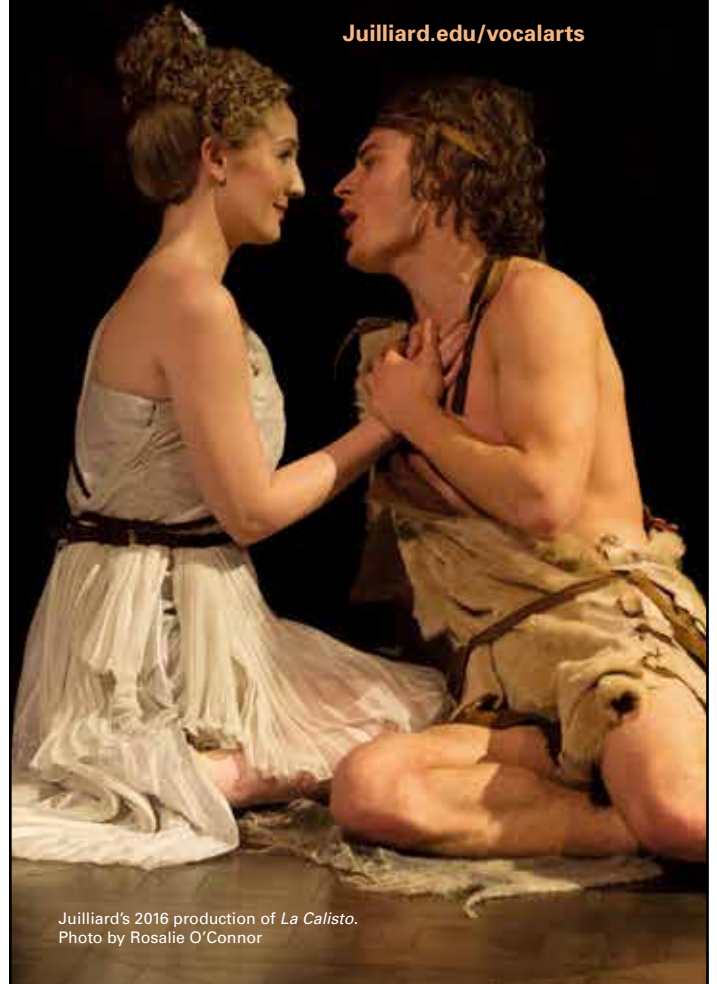
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