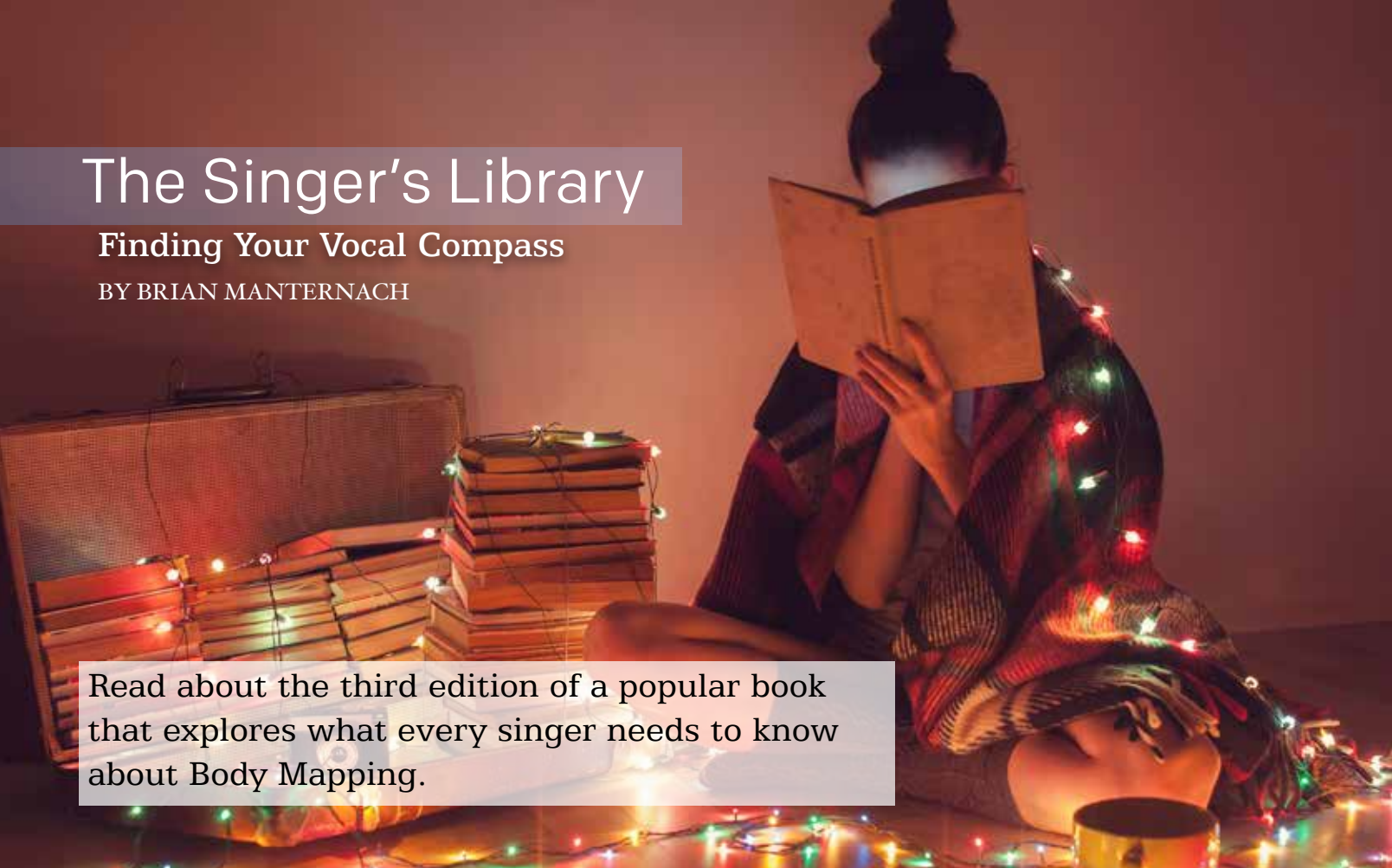


The Singer's Library

Finding Your Vocal Compass

BY BRIAN MANTERNACH



Read about the third edition of a popular book that explores what every singer needs to know about Body Mapping.

Although Barbara Conable taught Body Mapping for the better part of 25 years, many singers may still be unfamiliar with the term. A helpful description is found in the first chapter of *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body*, where co-author MaryJean Allen describes a body map as “your mental representation of your body’s size, structure, location, and function.” Body Mapping, therefore, is “the process of refining, correcting, and embodying individual body maps.”

The idea to write *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body* came after Allen completed her training and licensing in Body Mapping under Conable in 2000. Allen approached her teacher about turning the course “What Every Musician Needs to Know about the Body” into a book specifically for singers. With Conable’s guidance, and after recruiting fellow licensed Body Mapping practitioners Kurt-Alexander Zeller and Melissa Malde as co-authors, *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body* made it to print.

Now available in its third edition, the book has even more content on the ins and outs of Body Mapping. The authors share their thoughts below on why the technique continues to be so well received and what new surprises readers will find in the most recent edition.

Congratulations on the release of the third edition of *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body*. What do you think it is about the book that has driven its popularity and resonated so well with singers and voice teachers since its initial release in 2008?

MaryJean Allen: Thanks so much! I think our book has been positively received because among the hundreds of vocal pedagogy, anatomy, and physiology books, ours was the very first book written specifically for singers about the process and application of Body Mapping. Body Mapping teaches everyone how to apply anatomical facts to movement. So Body Mapping enhances and improves all styles of singing and musical artistry.

Kurt-Alexander Zeller: What I’ve heard from many singers is that they appreciate the clear illustrations and descriptions and they find it easy to use however they like. They can dip into it and read about one small subject that piques their interest, or they can consider an entire chapter, or they can digest the whole thing—whatever serves their needs. It seems to me that many people appreciate that it was our intention not to advocate for (or against) any specific technique or style. We hope this book provides singers with accurate information about the body that allows them



Brian Manternach



Kurt-Alexander Zeller



Melissa Malde



MaryJean Allen

to make their own choices about what best serves their own artistic ends—but allows them to make those choices based upon reality rather than upon fantasy.

Melissa Malde: I believe this book has gained popularity because it demystifies the processes of singing. There is so much of our instrument that we can't see and hear accurately, and voice instruction has traditionally relied significantly on use of metaphor and imagery. Our book was one of the first not only to describe singing as specific movements but also to give singers a practical way to work on those movements.

What have been the major changes and additions as each edition has come out?

MJA: Both content and organization of our book's three editions have changed a great deal. For example, some images were deleted, several images were added, organization and content changed a great deal from the first edition to the third edition, and content significantly increased for our third edition. These changes and additions occurred due to feedback we received from colleagues, students, participants in workshops, and peer review.

MM: The third edition benefitted greatly from going through peer review. The comments of our readers helped us see our writing in a fresh light, and we were able to clarify some things that were confusing in prior editions. Also, having the companion website with audios and videos of the recordings is a fantastic resource.

Has Body Mapping changed much in the years since the first edition of the book was released, either in how it is taught or how it is practiced?

MM: The basic material and principles are the same, but as our organization grows and as we continue to find out more through research into the brain, the course we teach grows richer. As we know more and more, both individually and as an organization, the challenge is to keep the material simple enough for people exposed to it for the first time to be able to assimilate it without being overwhelmed with detail.

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Book Review

In my college days (before GPS phone apps) I would regularly buy new maps of the states between school and home in the hopes of finding a route that would shave some time off the multi-hour drive. Having taken wrong turns, encountered unexpected construction, and muddled my way through confusing directions from local gas station attendants, I understood the importance of a detailed, up-to-date road map.

The same can be said of Body Mapping. Even for those of us who have been singing for years, if our mental conceptions of how our bodies function are contrary to biological reality, our singing efficiency may suffer. Melissa Malde, MaryJean Allen, and Kurt-Alexander Zeller dispel many of these misconceptions in their book *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body*. Its already matchless information has recently been further enhanced, expanded, and elaborated upon in a new third edition.

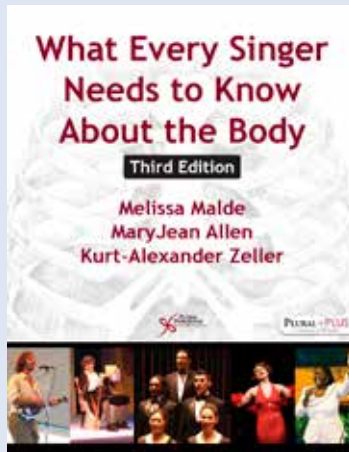
The most significant additions are the extensive and meticulously compiled online resources, which are practically an entire course unto themselves. The chapter-by-chapter guided exercises, demonstrations, and testimonials appear on a companion website as video and audio clips, most of which feature the authors as narrators and test subjects.

These in-house resources, which are unique to this book, are supplemented by numerous outside sources, cited throughout the book and collected on the "web resources" document found on the website. Even more web content has been promised as it becomes available.

The authors write that no book can serve as the final word on the subject of Body Mapping since continued brain-body research is ongoing and ever evolving. With this in mind, the online component may replace the need for further editions of the book, as new information may be added to the website or updated as necessary.

Just as GPS apps undergo system updates to incorporate new roads and to better locate the smoothest path from point A to point B, the third edition of *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body* provides information on Body Mapping that is more current and extensive than that of the previous editions. Authors Malde, Allen, and Zeller have created and compiled a vast array of new instructional resources that complement and reinforce the information from the text, further uncovering the physical awareness and freedom needed for effective and enjoyable singing.

—Brian Manternach



MJA: Just as science and Body Mapping evolve, so does our teaching. All licensed Body Mapping teachers and teacher trainees are continuously in contact with each other via our Body Mapping Listserve and our biannual conferences. We continuously strive individually and collectively to teach Body Mapping more effectively and clearly.

In Malde's chapter titled "How to Use this Book," she describes that before her work in Body Mapping she was often unable to fix performance issues since she would isolate the problem rather than putting it in the context of her whole body. And, yet, the chapters of the book focus quite a bit on isolated parts of the body—e.g., the six places of balance, the framework of breathing, the structures of articulation, etc. Is this because readers must accurately understand the individual parts first in order to see how they interact together for singing?

MM: This is an excellent question and one that comes up in almost every workshop we teach. Everything is related [and] connected, and a body map does not need to be conscious to govern our movement. However, if we notice that a movement is inefficient, we need to bring the body map of that movement into our conscious mind, examine it, and correct it. Sometimes this correction is immediate. More often, the correction takes time to become the new, adequate, and accurate map. This is especially true if we have had the old habit for a long time.

Because of this, there is always a period where we need to bring our attention to a specific area. When we do this, sometimes awareness changes to concentration. When that happens, we encourage people to relate the movement they are correcting to the rest of the body through inclusive awareness. Trying to solve issues in isolation is almost never helpful.

What are some of the more common mis-mappings of the body that you find among singers?

KAZ: Common singer mis-mappings—they are legion, but I think the broad areas of respiration and resonance are where the largest number of mis-mappings cluster. Every year I still am astonished by the number of amazing fantasies about breathing I hear from new students.

Many of them truly don't even know where their lungs are—somebody once told them to “breathe low” and now they think their lungs are in their intestines. Or they think that ribs are stationary or immovable. Or that the diaphragm is a vertical structure. And they will do their darnedest to move as if that faulty body map were reality.

Another common mis-mapping that drives me crazy is the idea that the muscles of facial expression on the outside of the

skull are directly connected to laryngeal or pharyngeal muscles—of which the old “lifting your eyebrows will keep the pitch from sagging” myth is one notorious manifestation. These are almost stereotypical singer myths—but one does encounter them fairly often.

MM: Thinking that you have to do something with the abdominal muscles to start the exhalation is a common misconception. Engaging the pharyngeal muscles in an attempt to “open” the throat is another. Many singers cannot take a quick breath quietly without extraneous movement. Recruiting the extrinsic muscles of the tongue to do the work of resonance is very common. Many singers have no idea where their head balances on their spine or what muscle is responsible for opening the jaw.

These are a few of the issues that come up time and again, but there are many more.

Singing opera can have vastly different demands than singing in a choir or singing musical theatre. Can Body Mapping help singers make the necessary adjustments needed for each of these styles of singing?

MJA: Body Mapping improves and enhances movement. Singing is movement, so Body Mapping can help all ages and styles of singers.

MM: Absolutely. Difference in singing style is always a result of difference in movement. When you start defining it that way, the path to singing effectively in multiple styles becomes clearer. These movements are almost always connected to resonance in some way.

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Other books in the series are written specifically for instrumentalists (*What Every*

***Oboe Player Needs to Know About the Body, What Every Trombonist Needs to Know About the Body, etc.*). Although each has a different author, was an effort made to maintain consistency of content or format between each of the books?**

KAZ: All the books in the “What Every” series do have a certain consistency of content, in that they all are required to contain the basic information in the “What Every Musician Needs to Know about the Body” course. However, we're not required to adhere to a specific format, and there is great

variety of format and, even tone between, each of the books.

Considering that for singers the body literally is the instrument, I expect *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body* would have to be the most thorough and all encompassing. Is it?

MM: No, I think each book has a great level of detail specific to the instrument. We like to say that singers don't need a neighborhood map of their hands and arms—a state map will do. However, we need a very detailed map of breathing and resonance. The opposite is true for violinists. Therefore, the violin book has great detail about hands, wrists, and arms while the singing book has great detail about breathing and resonance.

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MJA: A singer, actor, or dancer uses their body to express and make art. An instrumentalist plays an instrument outside of his or her body to express and make art. But what is more important is that we use our body to make art, whether the instrument is our body or the instrument is outside of our body. So, learning how to use our body is key. This is both how and why Body Mapping helps everyone.

It seems the book is a true collaboration, since you all contributed chapters while Conable wrote both the introduction and the first appendix. Did you all have input on each other's chapters or did you strictly focus on your assigned areas?

KAZ: One of the great joys of working on this book has been the

way we've worked together. Early on, we made the decision not to write in a homogenized committee voice, but rather that each author would write in her or his voice. But then we've always shared what we've written with each other and engaged in a lot of very lively back-and-forth discussion of each other's work. I think we've each sharpened and refined the others' thinking and prose.

MM: We all read and commented on the chapters written by the other authors. This was especially true in the first edition, and Barbara worked with each of us on that edition as well. In subsequent editions, the three main authors all read each other's work and commented as needed. It was very helpful to have the input of my co-authors when I was struggling with exact wording for a passage.

MJA: It has been a marvelous and beneficial experience to combine our three very different personalities, writing, and teaching styles to create all three editions of our book. I am very grateful to know and to have learned from Kurt and Melissa as friends, fellow Body Mapping teachers, and co-authors.

Brian Manternach is on the voice faculty of the University of Utah's Department of Theatre. In addition to his contributions to Classical Singer, he is an associate editor of the Journal of Singing. An active singer, he holds a doctor of music degree from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Visit www.brianmanternach.com for more information or contact him at bmantern@gmail.com. ©



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