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Captivating An Audience

By Miguel Andoor

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Learning proper singing technique is of course vital to your success as a performer. However, more important than this is the sense of your core, and your empathy with others -- in short, your humanity. Without these traits, a performer cannot hold an audience's interest, let alone captivate an audience. How do you develop these traits?

Be a social creature. Mix with people and nature, and realize that you are a member of both groups. When constantly engaged in a dialogue with your fellow humans, you will recognize the essence of a great singer; it is the same as the essence of a great human being.

To develop this recognition, simply meet and greet people with warmth every chance you get. Greeting audience members before or after a performance is a good start. There are opportunities throughout your off-stage life for you to do this, also. Consider that even though you may be in a checkout line in a supermarket, or eating a meal in a Chinese restaurant, you're still on stage and still performing. The personas we unconsciously don when we interact with the external world can help us connect with others, or distance us from others. The choice is yours. Decide to connect, and you'll discover resources that penetrate your persona. These resources can only help your singing.

Recognize that you are your first audience, and critic. You may not be your best audience or critic, but you can develop greater objectivity about how you sound. First, identify what it is about your singing that you like. Are there particular songs, or songs by a particular composer that make you value your singing more? Conversely, are there songs you sing that make you cringe at the sound of your voice? Write these distinctions down, and find patterns in them to help you discover what exactly it is you like best about your voice.

Take the time to record your singing, and listen to it. Many singers can remember their surprise when they first heard their own voice on a recording device. This surprise comes from the change in perspective from singer to listener, and due to the physics involved in listening to yourself while singing.

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A metaphor to illustrate this can be found in the sun. The sun is obviously the primary source of heat for all people on the earth. Yet, different parts of the earth experience different amounts of heat. Why? Because the media that the sun's heat is "communicated" through are different for those living near the Equator, for example, and those closer to the North or South poles. Among other factors, the ground near the Equator is a more directed and thus effective reflector of this heat than the ground near the Poles. For both the voice and the sun's heat, the source is the same, but the perception of it differs, based on the means of communication.

The key point to gather from this is the following: the perception others have of your singing is an invaluable source of feedback you can apply to improve your singing.

Love all creatures and savor nature. Everyone has their own distinctive key to their inner humanity.

The path to discovering what interests and even captivates another is different for each person. That said, there are some things that make everyone respond with warmth. This warmth radiates through us when we perform.

Pets, for example, can bring out everyone's friendliness and warmth. A pet — whether a dog, cat, hamster or goldfish — can stir feelings of compassion and devotion in you. When we feel these things, they manifest in our body, gestures and expressions. How could such feelings not draw an audience's interest when you manifest them in a performance?

During the Second World War, when a young man, I had a dog named Jerry. He was my constant companion since I was about six years old. I cherished him as a playmate. I knew he loved me innately, yet I took his love for granted. A short while after being inducted into the Air Force, I received a letter from my family. Jerry had stopped eating after I left home, and had died from hunger, pining for me. To this day, every performance I give has a bit of that pain I feel from Jerry's death. Never underestimate the power and resonance of love, and how it can affect your performance, no matter the source of that love.

The effects that other elements of Mother Nature have on us can also help us engage our audience's interest. For one thing, it's said that being near water is a boon to solving many problems. I can't explain this, but can testify to it a bit. Remember the last time you were at the beach? (When your enjoyment of it wasn't hindered by a horde of people.) Do you remember the feelings of calm and release that you felt then? This is nature's great gift. Remember that our bodies are composed mostly of water. It's as if bodies of water, when experienced in natural, open and peaceful settings, somehow transmit their life-sustaining qualities to us.

Rather than judge, listen. There's a saying that goes, "Happiness is that condition felt upon seeing the misfortune of a friend." That's pretty gloomy, yet it holds true when we judge instead of listening. Is it possible to listen when we want to judge? Isn't it just human nature to judge?

Judging means more than gauging the apparent degree of similarity a person has to us. A man may judge that someone else is like him. Yet, he may not like himself. A more focused definition of judging is needed. I believe what we usually refer to as judging in social interactions is actually condemning and finding fault. We seek weakness so we can disregard what others are saying. We do this so

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another's views of the world won't upturn our apple carts. Our condemnation of others is an indicator of our propensity to condemn ourselves. We must be gentler with ourselves, before we even face other people. How does condemnation help anyone? There's such finality in condemnation.

How effective do you think you'll be as a performer if you look out upon the audience and feel only anger or an inclination to find fault? Will it make you any more effective to turn this harsh perspective on yourself? No. Listening is the key to replacing such a condemning point of view. Listening helps us raise our consciousness, and that's just another way of saying, "Learning what is objectively true."

Listening involves, at least in part, listening to all things happening inside you: in your heart, your mind, and your body. It's been proven that any anxiety, or any emotion you feel, manifests itself in some physical form in your body. When we listen for our body responses, and connect them to our emotions, we become better able to control those emotions.

One way to listen to these body responses is possible through a relatively new form of therapy called biofeedback, where a device is attached to you to monitor certain of your bodily processes and excretions. Some devices can detect levels of nervousness by measuring the amount of sweat on your

skin. Other devices measure other emotions, albeit indirectly. People have found that they can consciously affect not only their states of mind, but also precise parts of their anatomy, by listening to the devices, and focusing their thoughts accordingly. This contradicts the conviction formerly held by many scientists, that such a high degree of control over the body and mind was not possible. Yoga is an alternative to biofeedback devices that achieves the same basic result: a much better ability to hear what's happening inside your body, so that you can change it. Such body awareness is vital to a performer's success in captivating an audience.

Is there any musician more acutely aware of the role of the body in the shaping of his performance than a singer? Is there a professional singer anywhere who does not have some wrinkle in his singing connected to a part of his body? Our bodies are our instruments. When we learn to listen properly to our bodies and how our emotions directly impact our bodies, we become the masters of our instrument.

Listen, sometimes, to the thoughts of others with whom you normally wouldn't associate. If you've labeled yourself as a "liberal," listen to some Rush Limbaugh. Find a grain of truth or goodness in what he says. If you're a fan of George Bush, read the thoughts of Al Gore. Why should we do this? To experience different points of view. When you perform in a role as part of a play, and even when you sing a song, you take on a persona that's not you. You adopt the personality of another. You gain skill in doing this when you read the thoughts of those with whom you would normally disagree. I guarantee that doing this will enhance your playing from the broadened view of life it creates in you.

Give it to God. When you receive applause for your performances, you know how such a response can go to your head. Our egos are stroked by such responses. There's a little voice inside saying, "It's all for me, it's all through me, it's all because of me!" You've become the center of the universe, as far as your ego is concerned. You then come to believe that this is the way it should always feel.

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Learn to channel these instances of positive feedback back to the audience, and to a higher power. Learn to associate yourself with that higher power and the audience. You are the focal point for the praise, yet you are not the repository or destination of the praise. You are the lens that captures applause and praise, and directs them with gratitude and love to God, to the audience, and whatever sources you give credit for building your skill and dedication to singing and to performing.

Don't block feelings; let them flow through you. When you hold onto negative or positive feelings without expressing them, you become greedy with your feelings. You become an emotional miser. Such a creature is unfit for performing, and unfit for transmitting and interpreting works by great composers for any kind of audience.

If you are such a miser, all hope is not lost. Condition your mind to see yourself as a kind of way station for thoughts, ideas and emotions. As stated before, you are not the destination, you are the messenger.

This doesn't apply just to performing, but to living. As you experience any emotion in your non-performing life, do so with relish, letting the feeling wash through you. Taste its sweetness. This doesn't mean you give in to destructive feelings such as hate or jealousy. You can experience these emotions, and yet still maintain an objective part of you that corrals the feeling in one door of your mind, and out another, so to speak.

Talk of expressing and conveying emotions to an audience often brings up the topic of crying. The

following questions arise: Is it proper for a performer to cry onstage before an audience? Does this help or hinder the performance? Most important, does crying engage an audience? To this, a famous actress once offered, "If you cry, the audience won't." This may be true. Remember, there is a subtle distinction between being a "carrier" or a "transmitter" of emotions, and being a collecting point or receptacle for emotions. Let feelings flow through you and to the audience, without letting them become trapped within.

In the film *Remains of the Day*, Anthony Hopkins, no slouch at conveying the full range of human emotion, communicates feelings that leave you emotionally ripped apart at the end of the film. Yet, his character doesn't cry once in the film. For much of the film his character is stoic, quiet, laconic, and subservient. Hopkins' mastery of being a conduit or conductor for emotion, rather than a recipient or host, makes the character and film successful.

Conclusion. Many materials exist to help you learn specific techniques to lure an audience's interest. But without a deep awareness of the full range of your humanity, you can't sustain that interest. The greatest performers are those most human. And you needn't look just to other performers to model great people. Seek beyond the disciplines of singing and performing to adopt the compassion and empathy of others: the Carnegies and Rockefellers, the Schweitzers and Mother Teresa's. May you find fulfillment in giving each of your performances.

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Career support for singers, vocal teachers and vocal students.

Operatic baritone Miguel Andoor has enchanted audiences around the world for more than four decades. He has also performed in most of the major professional opera companies on the East Coast, including the Metropolitan Opera. He has received rave notices on his brilliant voice and unusually authentic acting ability. More information about Miguel is available at his web site, www.ClassicalSingers.org.

The Secret to Writing a Captivating Speech for Any Occasion

By Sir Jon Weaver

'The Secret to Writing a Captivating Speech for Any Occasion' by Sir Jon Weaver

You're going to write a speech. And you're scared to death. Sure, I know you're not afraid of the speechmaking. Spouting it out is comparatively easy; in fact, it may be fun. But writing—ah! That is another story.

At the start let's write this speech to Joe. We'll pick out a typical Joe from your audience, a fellow who is a fairly good composite of the group. Then we'll write our speech directly to Joe.

How do you think of the group to whom you're going to talk? Perhaps you think of them as gentlemen and scholars. Again as brothers. Or maybe more familiarly as "you guys" or "you lugs." But no matter how you have them pegged, there is one Joe among them who is a cross section of all of them.

Let's put the words down on paper just as you would speak them to Joe. Write the word "Joe" up there at the start of the first paragraph, put a comma behind it, and write:

Joe, as I stand up here on the platform tonight I can think of the time a few years ago when I met you in Kansas City. Remember, Joe? It was in that little restaurant with the blonde waitress. I still remember, Joe, what you said that night.

Would Joe and a group of Joes listen to a story like that? You know they would. And whenever you start off so closely to this Joe's thoughts and interests, you are certain to get attention. Once I heard a speaker start a talk to a group of his dealers with, "Gentlemen and Chiselers." He smiled when he said it, of course, but the crowd roared. He was talking right down their alley. And all through the talk you could see that this man had thought of the Joes out in front of him when he was writing it to the one Joe who was a composite of the group. He wrote it just as he would talk to that Joe face to face. His talk was on the beam every minute.

Writing to Joe, you keep your talk on a conversational level. Sit him across the desk and talk to him as you write. You can't go high-hat on a guy across the desk. You won't get up in the blue sky, over his head, if you imagine he is right there talking to you, asking a question now and then. Putting in an argument occasionally. Adding a thought or two. No, you'll keep down to earth where your talk belongs.

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This goes for any kind of audience. All groups are made up of Joes. You may be talking to bankers, lawyers, merchant chiefs, rich men, poor men, beggar men, or thieves. But in each group there is an average Joe. Pick out that individual and write your speech to him.

By simply following this one piece of advice, you will be on the road to writing conquering your writers block, shoving nervousness aside and end up writing a great, audience captivating speech!

Discover how to write audience captivating speeches with this FREE step-by-step guide. FREE information and articles on every aspect of great Speechwriting for every occasion! It's FREE – Click here:



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