



Denver Center
Theatre Company

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A STUDY GUIDE

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MASTER CLASS



MARIA CALLAS PHOTO COURTESY OF PHOTOFEST

“A performance is a struggle. You have to win. The audience is the enemy — we have to bring them to their knees....”

Master Class, Act I

*“People are forgetting how to listen.
Listening takes concentration.
If you can’t hear me, it’s your
fault. You’re not concentrating.”*

Master Class, Act I

In 1971, Maria Callas gave a series of 12 master classes for aspiring singers at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. On this particular night (the place and the time are unspecified), the audience is comprised of would-be opera stars, teachers, groupies and anyone else who has come to watch the tempestuous diva dominate, cajole, lecture, insult and struggle with the memories of her own life of triumph and torment.

She is ready to devote concentration and commitment to the three young singers who appear before her: Sophie, a sweet young soprano; Tony, a handsome young tenor with a big ego; and Sharon, a statuesque soprano, who, though intimidated by Callas, is encouraged and coached by one of the great artists of the 20th century.

More a tour de force or one-woman show than a play with a plot, the evening is hilarious, poignant and entertaining. It is not necessary to love opera to be in the thrall of this awesome, complex, flawed and brilliant diva, a woman capable of devastation and inspiration, of extreme emotional contradictions and artistic grandeur. The world shall probably never see her like again. ■

TWA

“Her voice was tremendously powerful, prodigious in its range. — But this marvelous voice did not please everyone, for it was by no means smooth and velvety. Indeed, it was a little harsh and was likened to the taste of a bitter orange.”

—Camille Saint-Saens
on the voice of Pauline Viardot.

Maria Callas was born with a voice that could not be classified within any soprano categories: coloratura, lyric, dramatic, or mezzo. She was a *soprano sfogato* — an unlimited soprano. Her range, in her best years, was three octaves but the sound did not always please the listeners or critics. Previous *soprano sfogatos*, such as Giudetta Pasta (1798-1865) and Pauline Viardot (1821-1910), had the same vocal extension and it was acquired with some sacrifice. Their voices lacked the evenness of color and scale so prized in singing. There were also unruly sections of their voices which they could never fully control. Both Pasta and Callas had trouble with their very highest notes, particularly high C. But the *soprano sfogato* brought “a previously undreamed of excitement, power and fullness to high-lying phrases and to passages which called for great

agility and scintillation.”¹ There was also a pathetic or melancholy quality that stirred a listener’s deepest emotions; this quality was perfect for operas like *Norma*, *La Sonnambula* and *Anna Bolena*, roles which would be the pinnacle of Callas’ career. Callas also reestablished the *Bel Canto* ideal. *Bel Canto* (beautiful singing) dates back to the 18th century when *castrati* (boys who were

castrated to preserve their high soprano voices) sang with a flowered style which favored heavily embellished melodies. A singer in this period was thought to be deficient unless he possessed a full command of roulades, trills, arpeggios, scale passages and other ornaments. When the *castrati* began to decline, the female soprano voice began to exert influence. There was a growing emphasis on grace and femininity; composers,

*“MENDY:
She’s given me so much; pleasure, ecstasy, a certain solace, I suppose, memories that don’t stop. We’ll never see her like again.”*

Terrence McNally,
The Lisbon Traviata, Act I

TIMELINE

- 1923** Maria Anna Sophi Cecilia Kalgeropoulos is born on December 12 in the United States.
- 1938** Parents divorce; mother and two daughters return to Greece. Maria is admitted to the National Conservatory and begins her music studies.
- 1939** Elvira de Hidalgo becomes Maria’s voice teacher, mentor and a major influence in her life. First professional operatic debut as Beatrice in *Bocaccio*.
- 1940’s** Sings *Turandot* in Chicago, *La Gioconda* in Verona, *Brunnhilde* in *Die Walküre*, *Elvira* in *I Puritani* at La Fenice opera house in Venice.
- 1949** Marries Giovanni Battista Meneghini, a wealthy Italian industrialist who becomes her manager.
- 1951** Opens the Season at La Scala; achieves triumph in Milan and in her career over the next seven years.
- 1957** Is introduced to Aristotle Onassis and they later become lovers.
- 1958** Career begins to falter; she quarrels with opera managers and directors and walks out on a gala performance of *Norma* in Rome.
- 1960’s** Annuls her marriage by relinquishing her American citizenship. Gives up the stage to devote herself to Onassis.
- 1964** Last opera performance of her career *Tosca* at Covent garden in London
- 1968** Onassis marries Jacqueline Kennedy throwing Callas into grief from which she never recovers.
- 1971-1972** Gives a series of master classes at the Juilliard School of Music in New York.
- 1974** On a recital tour with tenor Guisepppe di Stefano, gives her last public performance in Sapporo, Japan.
- 1977** Dies of natural causes. ■

such as Donizetti and Bellini, wrote operas of romantic sentiment that balanced voice, drama and expression. But these composers left some freedom for singers to improvise with vocal display. Some singers embellished or changed an aria so much that “the changes had no connection whatever with the harmony of the author...”²

Callas tried to restore the *Bel Canto* ideal of vocal freedom but with restrictions on embellishments. “True vocal freedom finds expression in vitally resonant tones covering a wide pitch range, in complete control over extremes of dynamics, and in ease and flexibility of execution.”³ Though Callas was not always successful in this ideal, she possessed the technical equipment. Her teacher, Elvira de Hidalgo, taught her the *Bel Canto* method of singing: how to approach a note, how to attack it, how to form a legato passage, how to create a mood, and how to breathe so there is a feeling of only a

beginning and ending. She also had an assortment of embellishments, trills, scales and other fireworks.

Maria was the consummate artist and worked tirelessly to perfect her roles. She approached the music exactly as the composer wrote it. She spoke the words before she sang them to find the natural rhythm. While she was learning the notes, she relied on a vocal coach to remind her of note values. After breaking the music down into its parts, she went to every rehearsal, whether called or not, so she could “live” the music. At rehearsals, she sang full voice to test her possibilities and strengths and began to add movement to music to form a character. The dramatic truth for her came from the music, and her characters changed and deepened as she searched the score in order to convince the audience of the validity of the role she was playing. Before the master classes began, she remarked: “We must change with life in order to serve the composer.”⁴

Maria Callas damaged her voice by expecting more of herself and her voice than she could possibly withstand. Maria abused her voice by singing parts that called for great volume (Brunnhilde in *Die Walküre*) and then roles for great agility (Elvira in *I Puritani*) in the course of one week. She sang roles in such operas as *Giaconda*, *Butterfly* and *Tosca* which call for maximum tension in the middle and top ranges against a large orchestra. Above all, Callas sang with full commitment in both performance and rehearsals. With all the psychological trauma she experienced, psychiatric therapy might have helped, but Maria preferred to use this angst on the stage. As Franco Zeffirelli said: “If only she could have persuaded herself to cheat; but that was a way out which she could never accept.”⁵ ■

*“According to Nietzsche,
greatness means
‘giving direction’.
— [Maria Callas was
great] because she gave
service to tradition while
making something new. —
Not only did she
revolutionize singing
technique, but
brought music which
seemed dead back to life.”*

Kesting, p. 26.

THE PLAYWRIGHT *Terrence McNally*

“My characters (are) in the words and not in extraneous stuff. Which is exactly the way Callas felt about music ... it’s in the notes Bellini, Verdi, Rossini wrote... .”

Zinman, p. 10.

Terrence McNally was born on November 3, 1939 in St. Petersburg, Florida, son of Hubert Arthur and Dorothy Katherine McNally. Early in his childhood, the family moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, where his father operated a beer distributorship. As a child he was enthralled while listening to the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts on radio and attended musical comedies; both had a profound influence in his life.

From 1956 to 1960 McNally attended Columbia University as a journalism major where he graduated, Phi Beta Kappa. Summers, he worked as a reporter on the *Corpus Christi Caller Times*. On a fellowship awarded by the University, he spent six months in Puerto Vallarta. There, he sent a play to Molly Kazan, wife of the director Elia Kazan, at the Actor’s Studio in New York. As a result, he became stage manager there in 1961.

His life took a unique turn between 1961 and 1962, when he went on a world tour with the John Steinbeck family as companion/tutor to the two Steinbeck sons. Also his play, *This Side of the Door*, won the Stanley Award.

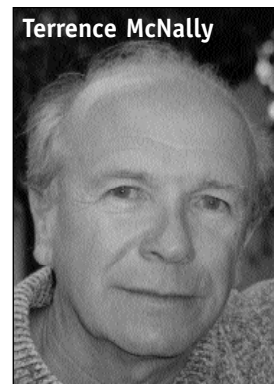
He then became film critic for *Seventh Art*, a New York magazine, and later became assistant editor of *Columbia College Today*. In 1966 and 1969 he won Guggenheim Fellowships and was runner-up for the Drama Desk Award for the Most Promising Playwright.

In 1974, he won two awards: one the Hull-Warriner for his play, *Bad Habits*, and the Most Distinguished Play, Obie Award for *The Ritz*. He also won the Hull-Warriner Award for *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* in 1987 and in 1989 for *The Lisbon Traviata*.

McNally’s plays of the 90s continue to win awards. He won an Emmy Award for Best Writing in a Miniseries or Special for *Andre’s Mother*, a drama about a mother coming to terms with her son’s homosexuality and death from AIDS. In 1993, he won a Tony for Best Book of a Musical for *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and the same award for *Ragtime* in 1998. *Love! Valour! Compassion!* won a Tony for Best Play in 1995, as well as the Outer Critics’ Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award. Terrence McNally was also named “Person of the Year” by the National Theater Conference for his contribution to American theatre. *Master Class* won the Tony for Best Play in 1996 and a Best Actress Award for its star, Zoe Caldwell. ■

“I think this play (Master Class) is about play writing — about the need for art, about what we do with our enormous feelings, how we can keep some sanity... .”

Zinman, p. 149.



Terrence McNally

THE WOMAN MARIA CALLAS

The first words Maria heard from her mother were: "Take her away." They were spoken when the new baby was brought to Evangelia. She wanted a son to replace her lost Vasily who died from typhoid fever at the age of three. Despite this beginning, Maria thrived, though it was not easy for her. She was younger, plainer, fatter and less charming than her older sister, Jackie. In the competition for her mother's love Jackie won, leaving Maria with ambivalent feelings toward her older sister. She was extremely envious of her, yet adored her. Starved for love by those around her, she filled the emptiness inside her with food. When she started wearing glasses at the age of five, she became so convinced of her ugliness that she would shut her eyes when she passed a mirror. She felt "detested and detestable; she was convinced that she was an ugly duckling, fat clumsy, and unpopular."⁶

By the age of 12 she had discovered the way to her mother's heart was through singing and that music was the way out of her despised obscurity. Though she disliked school, she learned that to be weak and ignored is to be wretched. She used her voice to put an end to the humiliation of the supposed superiority of those around her. The foundation had been laid early for her bleak view of the world and bitter philosophy of life. "To live is to suffer, and whoever tells children this is not so is dishonest, cruel..."⁷

By the time she was 13, Maria had made up her mind to be someone; she turned this determination to becoming the best singer in the world. This ambition fostered fierce passions which resulted in her tempestuousness and tantrums. In Athens at the age of 17, when she was to replace an elderly soprano in *Tosca*, she was blocked by the husband of the aforesaid soprano at the stage entrance. Maria's response was to jump at him and scratch his face with both hands. There is little doubt that the potential for violence lurked just beneath the surface and the press recognized very early that "Callas the Tigress" sold more copies than "Callas the Opera Singer." The press was also present when the tension flared between Maria and Renata Tebaldi, another famous *Bel Canto* soprano. Though their voices were radically different, the two prima donnas sang the same roles and there were encounters, both professional and social, when sparks would fly. Sometimes these "discussions" even threatened to turn into brawls. Maria also looked upon her colleagues as adversaries. Her cynicism about the motives or talent of others was deep and rooted in her insecurities about herself. "She did not want to adapt to social norms and did not attempt to be 'nice'..."⁸

Maria was plagued by illness. Throughout her life she was much too driven to pace herself and after singing many difficult roles in too short a time, her body rebelled. Exhausted by overwork, nerves and anxiety, she was forced to rest a month or more before resuming her career. Later in life, her illnesses were exacerbated by the psychological effects of her ill-fated romance

with Onassis and her extreme loneliness.

Stories abound about Maria's mythical weight transformation from 1954 to '55. From secret treatments by Swiss doctors to ingesting a tapeworm to expelling a tapeworm, no one seems to know the real facts. Stassinopoulos writes that it was a diet of salads and raw meat that resulted in a loss of 62 pounds. Whatever the method, Maria's role-model was the actress Audrey Hepburn. Both had the same cosmetician in Paris, Alberto de Rossi. He introduced the two women and they all met in Paris for dinner. Hepburn wrote: "Maria explained that she wanted to lose weight and asked Alberto to correct her make-up in the way that he did for me. She took me as her model! That was an immense compliment for me..."⁹

Callas often felt isolated from her colleagues and detached from the world around her, which was caused by her aloofness and psychological deprivation. Many of the "Renata Tebaldi" camp resented Maria after Tebaldi's departure from the La Scala Opera House in Milan and the ranks of the resentful were further swollen by Maria's attitude that the world was a hostile place. Despite the attentions of her husband, Battista Meneghini and her frequent visits with her teacher, Elvira de Hidalgo, Maria felt isolated. In the years after Onassis, she turned to phoning friends at 1 or 3am just to hear a voice.



*"I am a creature of destiny.
Destiny chose me, wanted me this way.
I am outside myself and watch
my life from the outside."*

Callas from Allegri, p. 30.

Aristotle Onassis had entered Maria's life when she was looking for a reason to stop living and working as she had since she was a girl at the Athens Conservatory. Always pursuing position and perfection, always insecure and apprehensive, Maria was transformed by love. "Onassis brought her love, frivolity, passion and tenderness to the life of a dedicated nun who had begun to lose the taste for her vocation."¹⁰

Aristo (Maria's name for Onassis) made her aware of her sensuality and was her first real lover. He was the center of a new dream for her...security, marriage, perhaps a child. But then, tragically, the affair that had begun so impetuously lost its momentum. In 1959, Maria legally separated from Meneghini and 11 days later Tina Onassis sued her husband for divorce in New York. Maria believed her new dream was coming true. But after Tina's divorce petition, Onassis became more withdrawn...

Continued on page 5

appearing and disappearing; he could no longer to be relied upon for the support Maria needed. Sometimes, he was abusive and humiliated her in front of guests. "Who are you?" he once asked. "You're nobody. You are a woman with a whistle in her throat that doesn't work anymore."¹¹

Although Franco Zeffirelli and others tried to persuade Maria to resume her career, she was submissive to Onassis who mangled the contracts she was offered. In August 1968, Onassis told her to leave the yacht "Christina" and return to Paris. The Kennedys were coming to visit and the situation might look awkward. Maria understood and replied: "You will never see me again."¹² The idyll was over. Maria traveled from Paris to Dallas to Las Vegas to Los Angeles to New York, but could find no peace anywhere. On October 20, 1968, Onassis married Jackie Kennedy on the island of Skorpios. Maria spent the day in her apartment and in the evening, exquisitely dressed, went to the theatre and Chez Maxim, the famous Parisian restaurant.

Despite the master classes of 1971-72 and an attempt at reviving her career with the tenor di Stefano in concerts, Maria's life was increasingly dominated by the past. She would watch Westerns on TV or listen to her old recordings. Yet she would never speak of retiring or even admit that she had. After the death of Onassis in 1975, she seemed shriveled, shrunken and more isolated than ever. Her last pilgrimage was to his grave on Skorpios in July 1977, where she spent hours kneeling in prayer. On September 16, 1977, she died in her own bed in her Paris apartment. ■

*"Vissi d'arte, vissi
d'amore, non feci mai
male ad anima viva!"
(Love and beauty, life's
fairest treasures; these
humbly I served and deeply
cherished.)"*

Aria from *Tosca*, Act II. Giacomo Puccini, composer. Lyrics by V. Sardou, L. Illica, G. Giacosa.

The Arias in the play

Terrence McNally uses three arias in the play to demonstrate Callas' teaching techniques and to reflect on her life. The first is "Non credia mirarti" from *La Sonnambula* by Bellini. Anina, the heroine, is walking in her sleep and looking at her hand as if searching for a ring. Her fiance, Elvino, took back the ring and broke their engagement but still she sings: "Your image is printed in my heart."¹³ Her aria translates (freely) into these words as she looks at some withered flowers. "I hadn't thought I'd see you dear flowers, perished so soon. You died as did our love that only lived for a day. If only my weeping could restore your strength again... But all my tears can never bring back his love to me."¹⁴

This aria brings back memories of Callas' relationship with Onassis as well as her triumph at La Scala. The final two lines remind us of her grief over the end of the affair and his marriage to Jackie Kennedy. Perhaps, it is a premonition of Onassis' death in 1975 and Maria's all-consuming sorrow over it.

The tenor aria "Recondita armonia" from Act I of *Tosca* is sung by Cavaradossi as he paints a Madonna in the Altavanti Chapel. The words translate: "Strange harmony of contrasts thus deliciously blending My Floria's dusky glow with peach-like bloom contending. Thou fairest Queen of Heaven, gold are thy tresses and radiantly bright! Thine eyes are blue...and Tosca's dark as a moonless night. Art, that potent magician, many beauties combine in one ideal; To me, beloved Tosca, when I paint thy bright visage, thou alone art real!"¹⁵

Maria had never really heard this aria before since she was preparing for her entrance as Floria Tosca and probably because she was very self-absorbed

and paid little attention to others. Consequently, after Tony sings it, she is quite overcome by its beauty. The comparison of the golden-haired Madonna with the dark-eyed, dark-haired Floria suggests a sly reference to the fair Christina Onassis versus the dark Maria. The salute to "art, that potent magician" suggests what Maria tried to do with her singing: bring together the vocal technique, her interpretation and her feelings into a performance that was as real as it was ideal.

The last aria is the "Letter Scene" from *Macbeth* by Verdi. Lady Macbeth is reading a letter from her husband informing her he has been made Thane of Cawdor. Lady Macbeth sings: "An ambitious spirit is yours, Macbeth....You long for greatness but would you do wrong for it? Full of misdeeds is the path to power, and woe to him who sets his foot upon it doubtfully and then retreats! Come then! Hasten! That I may enflame that cold heart of yours. Boldness is needed to complete this task. I will give you courage. The prophetesses have promised the throne of Scotland to you. Why so reluctant? Accept the gift, arise to reign!"¹⁶

This aria stirs in Maria the past triumphs of her career. She "longed for greatness" and was willing to sacrifice and work harder than others. She married Meneghini for his money and managerial skills, not for love; she dieted to become "La Divina"; she fought the administrators of La Scala and other opera houses when she felt she was being treated unfairly. Perhaps it is also a summons to the Maria of 1971. Have courage; be bold; resume your career. ■

*"The older I get, the less I know but I am certain what we do matters."
Master Class, Act II*

ARISTOTLE ONASSIS

"Whatever it is, I fear Greeks even when they bring gifts."

Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 49.

"Whatever it is, I fear Greeks even when they bring gifts."
Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 49.

The life and character of Aristotle Onassis, in many ways, show similarities to that of the Greek mythological figure, Odysseus. Odysseus, a hero of the Trojan war with a reputation also for ruses and deceptions, was trapped on a long and arduous journey full of adventure until his return home where he lived and reigned in peace. Onassis never evaded a fight and spent all his energies consumed in an eternal struggle. His success as a businessman was linked to his aggressive desire to win at any price.

Aristotle was born in Smirne, Greece (supposedly the origin of the poet Homer) to Socrates Onassis, a tobacco dealer, and his wife Penelope. In 1909, Penelope died of kidney failure, leaving a void in Ari's life that he felt for the rest of his life. In 1927, Smirne was conquered by Turkish troops and all of the family except for Ari was sent to a concentration camp. Ari found the strength and inventiveness to organize an escape and to successfully liberate his father from the camp.

After his father's liberation, Ari emigrated to Argentina with \$250.00 in his pocket. There, he found work as a telephone operator. Reading the financial pages from London and New York, he invested his money and accumulated a dividend of 700 dollars. With this money, he bought a new wardrobe and began to frequent night clubs and the opera. He courted a soprano, Claudia Muzio, who opened the doors of Buenos Aires business and society to him.

His first business idea was to import Turkish tobacco into Argentina and then to expand into cigarette production.

The venture was successful. But nos-

talgia for the sea directed Ari toward his next enterprise. With the myth of Odysseus in mind, Onassis' objective was to own his own fleet of ships. With his cousin Kostas Gratsos, he bought six ships from the Canadian National Steamship Co., a subsidiary of the Canadian National Railway. He named the first two ships after his parents, the Penelope and the Socrates, and began a shipping fleet.

In 1946, Onassis married Tina Livanos, a Greek with American citizenship, and he established a home in New York. He was determined to gain respectability in the United States and to do this, he had to build his ships there. Ultimately, his plan was to bring millions of dollars into the American economy with super oil



Maria Callas and Aristotle Onassis on his yacht.

Photo courtesy of Photofest.

tankers built in American yards.

When it became difficult to build ships in the US, Ari went to Hamburg, Germany. There he converted Nazi ships into whalers. The price of whale oil was high and rising, so Ari hired a crew experienced in whale butchering. The whale ship — the Olympic Challenger — began harpooning everything in sight a month prior to the opening of the season. For three years, until 1954, the massacre continued. With the Arctic zone exhausted, Ari's ships headed toward Peru. There, one ship com-

manded by Captain Reichbert crossed the 200 mile limit and was fired on and boarded. Four hundred sailors were arrested and five ships sequestered. But Onassis had not left himself vulnerable. The ships were covered by insurance from Lloyds of London, so they paid the losses. But his days as a whaler adventurer were finished.

In 1956, Ari dismantled the fleet and sold it to the Japanese for 8 million dollars. Then, he turned his eyes to the skies and attempted to establish a national Greek airline. With generous concessions from the Greek government, Ari began Olympic Airlines. The airline was never really profitable until Alexander Onassis, Ari's son, began a taxi-airline service between Greek islands.

Alexander became famous for his control of small aircraft and for his urgent transports even during foul weather. He urged his father to buy helicopters instead of small airplanes, but Ari resisted. When Ari wanted a small plane (a

Piaggio) flown to Miami to be close to his yacht, Alexander began to instruct a new pilot to fly it. In the take-off from Athens airport on January 21, 1973, the plane crashed and Alexander was killed — his body only recognizable by the monogram on his handkerchief.

Ari was devastated. His marriage to Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy in 1968 had not brought him personal happiness and in 1974, he was diagnosed with a serious form of myasthenia, a muscular disease. One year later, after a gall-bladder operation, he died. His daughter, Christina, received 48 percent of his empire, and the other 52 per cent went to the "Alexander Onassis Foundation" to perpetuate the Onassis spirit through charity, art and the development of Greece. ■

tion, he died. His daughter, Christina, received 48 percent of his empire, and the other 52 per cent went to the "Alexander Onassis Foundation" to perpetuate the Onassis spirit through charity, art and the development of Greece. ■

"Nothing feeblener than a man does the earth raise up...for he believes that he will never suffer evil in the future as long as the gods give him strength and he flourishes in his strength."

Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. XVIII, line 130.

The Real Master Class

*“When it comes to music,
we are all students, all our lives.”*

Callas from Ardoin. “Learning from Callas” p.6.

“**I**n the months between October 11, 1971 and March 16, 1972, the best musical bargain in New York City was to be had on Monday and Thursday afternoons at the Juilliard School of Music in Lincoln Center. There, from 5:30 to 7:30 P.M. in the Juilliard theater, you could buy two hours of wisdom for five dollars from Maria Callas.”¹⁷



**Juilliard
School of Music**

Though she told the *New York Times* that she accepted the classes in order to help young singers start off on the right foot, Callas was also attempting to realign her voice and regain her sense of purpose and identity so that she could appear before the public again. Her self-imposed exile had left her very insecure.

She heard 300 applicants in the spring of 1971 for her classes and then narrowed the hopefuls down to 25. She allowed an audience to be present and the audience swelled to capacity with singers including Lucia Albanese and Placido Domingo; instrumentalists like Benny Goodman and Alexis Weissenberg; conductors like Andre Kostelanetz and Michael Tilson Thomas; and actors including Lillian Gish and Ben Gazzara.

“Callas the teacher” mirrored “Callas the artist”: she was totally professional, deadly serious, and completely focused. Each afternoon she went over the music to be heard that day with the accompanist, Eugene Kohn. Her comments were direct and sympathetic; if words failed

her she sang entire portions of arias. In her singing examples she used full voice as well as her body to show that singing was a coordinated activity. She approached the students as her colleagues. Her remarks were usually soft-spoken, though she could be tough as well as compassionate. She sought to bring out the individual gifts and personalities of each singer and gave reasons for her suggestions to the performers. She was always insistent, however, that the students remain faithful to the style of the given composer and stressed fidelity to the score and the message the composer was trying to convey. Technically, she emphasized singing accurate pitches and discouraged scooping and sliding to a note. She tried to persuade each student to develop a healthy, resonant sound through proper breathing and open throat.

On the whole, Callas was disappointed in the singers she worked with at Juilliard. She felt the students were too wrapped up in themselves and their sounds, and rarely seemed to hear and understand what she was telling them as they continued to make the same mistakes. This was the main reason the classes were not repeated. ■

*“My candle burns
at both ends;
it will not last the night,
But, ah, my foes,
and oh, my friends,
it gives a lovely night.”*

Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Glossary of Vocal Terms

ARIA an elaborate composition for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment in an opera.

ARPEGGIO the notes of a chord played (or sung) one after another instead of simultaneously.

BEL CANTO the Italian vocal technique of the 18th century with its emphasis on beauty of sound and brilliance of performance rather than dramatic expression.

COLORATURA a high soprano capable of singing rapid passages, runs and trills.

DRAMATIC SOPRANO powerful voice with marked declamatory abilities.

DYNAMICS degrees of volume in music.

LEGATO in singing, a smooth line without any interruption between the notes.

LYRIC SOPRANO has lighter quality than a dramatic soprano with a pleasant, gentle style.

MEZZO SOPRANO a soprano of “middle range” from low A to high F or G.

PRIMA DONNA the singer of the principal female role in an opera.

RESONANCE transmission of vibration from the voice.

ROULADES rapid passing notes inserted between two principal melodic notes; highly ornamented melody.

TESSITURA the general “lie” of a vocal part, whether high or low in its average pitch.

TRILL a musical ornament consisting of the rapid alternation of two notes.

DIVAS: Yesterday and Today

“Only a diva (translated as goddess) knows by pure alchemy how to combine all her abilities, virtues, characteristics and qualities and dares...to live dangerously.”

Kesting, p. 30.

Most opera singers of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s believe in the revolution begun by Maria Callas to turn opera into believable theatre. Most study and understand the meaning of the words so the music will automatically sound right; most realize that one has to express character through acting as well as singing. But most would never and will not live a life like Maria's.

A good example is Dame Joan Sutherland who retired from the operatic stage in 1990 at the age of 65. She admired and emulated her mother, a trained singer, who taught her some songs and technique in a casual way. At the Conservatory in Sydney, Australia, she met a young pianist, Richard Bonyngne, who was to have a decisive influence on her life and career. They were married in 1954 and he led her from singing Wagner to the land of *Bel Canto*. He also gave her constant emotional and artistic sup-

port. They traveled together to her vocal engagements and raised a son, Adam, who is now married with children. When singing, Joan was a very calm and steady artist, gardening and doing needlepoint when not on stage. Yet she had nearly a four octave range and sang the same roles as Callas: *Norma*, *Violetta in La Traviata*, and *Lucia in Lucia de Lammermoor*. She has been criticized for relying too much on the vocal line and not being sufficiently dramatic, but she feels the composer has written the vocal line to express the feelings he wants. She says with finality: “I think it is primarily for the sound of singing that people come to the opera. If they want a great dramatic performance they should go to a straight play. Them's my sentiments anyway!”¹⁸

One of the divas-in-training is Ruth Ann Swenson who recently made her debut in *Lucia de Lammermoor* at the Metropolitan Opera. Born on Long Island, trained at the San Francisco Opera, she is the picture of a modern

opera singer, smart, healthy, happy and married to another singer who recognizes the needs of a prima donna. Like many of today's sopranos, she possesses a magnificent voice directed by superb technique. But critics present a nagging doubt that applies to many American singers. Are they so healthy and confident that they lack the driving passion which transforms the singer into a great artist? Or is this transformation simply a mystery we can never understand? ■

“Diva meant something in the old days — grand and unknowable. Today, we like divas, but then we also demand they be easy and nice.”

Matthew Epstein in
Cinderella and Company
by Manuela Hoelterhoff, p. 74.

CARE OF THE VOICE

*“It is not my voice that is sick,
but my nerves.”*

Maria Callas.

Maria might have benefited from these suggestions from *The Singer's and Actor's Throat* by Norman A. Punt.

1. Avoid excessive muscular contractions especially of the throat and neck, not only when singing but all the time.
2. Only sing roles within your tessitura (the range of pitch where most tones of a part fall). If one cannot sing a high note softly, one ought not to sing it at all or at the most only two or three notes a week.
3. Do not sing too loudly or too often. Overwork and over-exercise of the vocal chords just weakens them.

4. Breathe without undue constriction or discomfort.
5. Articulate as clearly as possible.
6. Avoid risking damage to the throat by:
 - a. avoiding tobacco and alcohol,
 - b. avoiding poorly ventilated rooms,
 - c. avoiding excessively warming and drying heating systems,
 - d. avoiding exposure to cold, wet, foggy weather,
 - e. avoiding excessively cold or hot foods and drinks,
 - f. avoiding harmful sprays, paints and gargles.

In Colorado, extra-special care of the voice is needed. The Wilbur James Gould Voice Research Center of The Denver Center for the Performing Arts has these suggestions to overcome the dryness and low humidity in Colorado's thin air:

1. Sip water during presentations.

2. Alcohol is dehydrating, so if you party hearty, drink extra water.
3. If water gets boring, try seltzer water, decaffeinated tea, herbal tea or decaffeinated coffee.
4. Cut down on dairy products before performance; they produce excess mucous in the throat.
5. If you are taking medications, check with a physician to see if they have a drying effect.
6. Inhaling hot steam or cold vapor will always help in a dry climate.
7. Don't clear your throat; it irritates it. Drink water instead. ■

“The strange thing about a singer's fate is that she has to give everything for her singing...and then, in a flash, it is all over.”

Lisa della Casa. Kesting, p.54.

ACTIVITIES

Focus Exercises:

All performers have become accustomed to an audience. Many people are uncomfortable speaking, singing or performing in front of an audience. The following exercises force students to focus on a specific activity rather than the audience and this distraction aids in relaxation. Have the class try some of the following focus exercises.

Answers

1. Five students stand in line in front of class
2. The teacher fields questions from the class, such as "Why do stars shine?"
3. Each of the five students answers the question one word at a time. Start with the person on the right and work down the line until the question is answered. (ie: "Stars Shine because...")

Zip, Zap, Zop

1. Students stand in a circle
2. Teacher and students repeat order out loud: "zip, zap, zop, zip, zap, zop..."
3. Students repeat order with teacher many times until they seem to understand it.
4. One person (usually the teacher) will start with the word "zip." As the teacher says "zip" he/she will point to any other person in the circle. That person must pass "zap" onto another person in the circle. Person #3 passes "zop" onto a fourth person. Person number four starts again with "zip."
5. The game continues until someone stops the process.
6. For advanced groups, make the game competitive—if one person says the wrong word or waits too long, they are out of the circle.

BUSY-NESS

1. Have the class count off into two teams. Team one stands in a line facing the audience (which is team 2)
2. Team two must try to look cool and relaxed. If someone is fidgeting, or obviously uncomfortable, keep them busy by giving him/her a task (counting white shoes, counting lights etc...) until he/

she is looking comfortable.

3. Keep coaching them to focus on their activity.
4. When they all look comfortable, change the teams
5. Ask how they learned to overcome discomfort or nervousness while in front of an audience.

Expression Activities

In *Master Class*, the singers are urged to understand the meaning of what they are singing and to sing expressively. Whether singing or acting, it is necessary to use words expressively in order to convey meaning. Acting the words helps. It adds color and character to whatever you are saying. Use the whole body when performing these exercises.

Exercise 1

One person says the following words without expression. The students then repeat the words together adding the appropriate expression to impart the meaning of the words.

uptight
frantic
depressed
frustrated
hysterical
tired
silly
giggly
sour
tart
bossy
soft
hard
squishy
brittle
delicate
angry
delighted
bored

Add more words of your own to the list.

Exercise 2

Write a nursery rhyme on the board. Read the rhyme in a variety of ways and then have the class repeat it imitating you each time in chorus. The more creative you are the more fun you and the

class will have and it will loosen everyone up as well as encourage more expressiveness from your students.

loudly
softly
sneakily
as if frightened
as if delighted
as an advertiser
as a newscaster
sadly
angrily

(Add more descriptive words)

Exercise 3

On the Street Where You Meet. Divide the class into equal halves and call them group one and group two. Have the groups stand facing each other. Each student should be facing a student from the opposite group. When you signal them to begin, opposing students will walk and meet in the middle of the room. The student from group one will say "1, 2, 3, 4" as if saying "hello, how are you." The student from group two will say "5, 6, 7, 8" as if saying "fine thank you."

Now perform this exercise as:

friends
long lost friends
enemies
boss and employee
grand parent and young child
snobs
classmates
alien and human
with different accents (as if speaking two different languages)
bored people
people in a hurry
lonely people
frustrated people
giggling people
drunks
sleepy people

Now mix the two people that are meeting. Example one giggling and one in a hurry. Start again. ■

LOUD
Soft
ANGRY

frantic
delicate
UPTIGHT
silly

Notes

1. Ardoin, p. 5.
2. Reid, p. 9.
3. Ardoin, p. 6.
4. Ardoin, Callas at Juilliard, p. 9.
5. Kesting, p. 54.
6. Stassinopoulos, p. 26.
7. Stassinopoulos, p. 28.
8. Kesting, p. 9.
9. Kesting, p. 133.
10. Stassinopoulos, p. 203.
11. Allegri, p. 140.
12. Allegri, p. 142.
13. Bellini, p. 10.
14. Bellini, p. 10.
15. Puccini, p. 7.
16. Verdi, p. 2.
17. Ardoin, "Learning from Callas", p. 10.
18. Matheopoulous, p. 206.

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Inside Out is intended for students and teachers but may be enjoyed by audiences of all ages.



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