

Eyes on the Horizon

by Brian Manternach

Since winters in the mountain west can be long, I try to take every opportunity possible to get out in the warm air and sunshine once summer arrives. With numerous lakes and reservoirs nearby, I have recently taken up kayaking as a way to clear my mind while enjoying nature and the outdoors.

Inescapably, when I'm out on the water, I find aquatic-themed song snippets pop into my head—everything from "The River" by Garth Brooks to "Come Sail Away" by Styx to Schubert's "Auf dem Wasser zu singen." On one particular summer day, however, instead of the usual water music I found myself mentally singing "Breathe" from Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony Award-winning musical *In the Heights*. Naturally, when I got to the line "...with my eyes on the horizon," I lifted my focus up from the water to gaze further into the distance toward the shore.

I gradually came to recognize certain parallels between kayaking across a lake and the work of building skills and artistry in the voice studio.

First, get into a rhythm. Steady progress in a kayak occurs when each stroke of the paddle is smooth and efficient. Establishing a regular rhythm, devoid of erratic motions, will consistently propel the boat forward. But if I get distracted and lose my focus, my paddling gets sloppy, and I stop making progress.

Look up frequently to see what is in the not-too-distant future. Once I have set a routine and a rhythm, I have to remind myself to look up and see what's ahead. Maybe there is a log or an outcropping of rocks coming up that I'll need to maneuver around. If I catch these obstacles when they are still a ways

off, I can make subtle adjustments to get around them. If I don't look up often enough, I sometimes have to take quick evasive action to dodge an obstacle that I otherwise could have avoided.

Every so often, look toward the shoreline to make sure you're headed in the right overall direction. It doesn't take much to get off track. When my head is down and all I'm focusing on is the water immediately in front of me, I don't always notice if I

start heading somewhere other than my intended target. Again, the sooner I catch this change, the easier it is to make slight adjustments to get pointed in the right direction again.

Periodically, look back and appreciate how far you've come. A few times I've been paddling hard for what felt like a long time only to look up and find the shoreline seems just as far away as it was when I started out. It was only when I looked back over my shoulder to where I launched the kayak that I realized just how much distance I had actually covered. I had been too focused on the far-off destination to realize that I was, in fact, making significant progress.



Photo by Brian Manternach

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continued: Eyes on the Horizon

Enjoy the ride. Even though kayaking is recreation, it can be a lot of work. Inevitably, it is more enjoyable some days than others. Regardless, every time I get out on the water I'm struck by how lucky I am to be there, in nature, doing something I love.

I hope to bring a similar vision back to the voice studio, helping my students get into a rhythm, look to the not-too-distant future, appreciate their progress, check in occasionally on their long-term goals, and simply revel in the enjoyment of singing. While there will always be troubled waters to navigate through, I trust this approach will lead to smoother sailing.



Brian Manternach, D.M., is an Associate Editor of Journal of Singing, a columnist for Classical Singer, and serves as Utah District NATS Governor. A recipient of the NATS Voice Pedagogy Award, he has given workshops and presentations for numerous national and international organizations. An active singer, he teaches in-person and online lessons from his private studio in Salt Lake City, where he is also on the voice faculty of the University

of Utah's Department of Theatre. www.brianmanternach.com



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