

TRANSITIONS: Jonathan Pilkington—A Tenor Travels

NATS member Jonathan Pilkington’s life-long love of travel and singing inspired him to start his own business as a travel advisor, Pilkington Travel, LLC, with an emphasis on travel for musicians and music lovers.



After a decade of teaching voice at the college level, tenor Jonathan Pilkington left the safety net of academia for the bliss and uncertainty of world travel and travel planning. As he posted on Facebook:

“Time for the next chapter, which will include more singing, teaching, traveling, and planning travel for others.”

Inter Nos: What’s your story? Have you always loved to travel? Where have your travels taken you and what are some of your favorite places to visit?

J.P.: I caught the travel bug when my college choir toured Spain and France. Although it wasn’t easy to afford to travel while I lived in New York City, I managed a few trips. Where there’s a will, there’s a way! When my friend and fellow NATS member Matthew Markham was working on his DMA, he was able to “hire” me as his videographer in the Czech Republic, thanks to a university grant.

I was selected for the NATS Intern Program in 2009. That program, along with conversations with Carmen Balthrop, my master teacher, influenced my move back to rural Georgia. With a very low cost of living, it was much easier to travel on school breaks. I realized that any length of trip, domestic or

international, renewed my spirit, made me a better teacher, and ultimately a better human. Because of social media, I quickly became known as the person who travels, and conversations would often begin with people asking about my latest adventures.

Regarding my favorite place to travel, I would broadly say that Europe is my favorite. When I finished my DMA, I planned an adventure, on which I flew to London, took the train to Paris, rented a car there, and drove to the South of France (my absolute favorite!). I visited several places along the Mediterranean, then made my way to Italy, exploring Emilia-Romagna (for food!), and ended up near Venice, where my college choral director, John Ratledge, was staying to begin his summer conducting & singing program. Funny, I just made the connection of how the trip led by Dr. Ratledge gave me the bug, and this trip ended by visiting him!

Inter Nos: Where are you based now?

J.P.: I live in Atlanta, GA—back in my home state. After I finished my Master’s degree at Westminster Choir College, I lived in NYC for 6 years. In 2009, I moved back to Georgia to be closer to my family and to start a college teaching job. I really grew to love Atlanta for the culture, food scene, and the busiest airport in the world, so I moved here in 2016. At that time, I still had the college job, but my happiness was worth the hour commute.



Inter Nos: Did you have a sudden epiphany that you wanted to “run away from home and see the world”? Or has this been a life-long dream?

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J.P.: It was probably a life-long dream, and once I was able to have any amount of disposable income, I made it a priority. I did a search for budgeting apps and came across YNAB (You Need A Budget). Its approach really has changed things for me. As you make money, you give each dollar a job and place money into categories. After my basic needs are covered, I'm able to put money into the "travel" category. Ultimately, I guess it just makes me more mindful about my spending, which makes more things possible.



Inter Nos: How does your career as a professional singer and voice teacher benefit you as a travel expert?

J.P.: Since I am still new to the travel business, we will find out. However, I feel that this is a pretty unique career combination. As an educator, I feel that part of my job is to educate people on the benefits of a travel advisor, as well as open their eyes to possibilities. As a musician, I believe I have a unique opportunity to organize and lead tours based on my musical knowledge. I'll mention a few fun ideas. One is a "History of Musical Theatre" (I've taught that class) tour in NYC. Instead of just booking a Times Square hotel and seeing a few shows, we could see an opera/opera, some cabaret, visit Tin Pan Alley, and see some shows on Broadway. Of course, there are endless ideas for European travel related to music! Jim Phillips, NY bodywork



expert, and I just announced "Sing at Sea 2020—Singing and Wellness Cruise" on the Norwegian Encore, a 7-day Bahama cruise with a pre-departure hotel night in NYC (Tentatively May 31-June 7.)

I am excited about Travelex International, my host agency, because they already offer classical music tours, such as a Santa Fe Opera tour and multiple European tours. They are very supportive and have the knowledge and enthusiasm to help me create my own tours.

Inter Nos: Are you still performing and teaching voice?

J.P.: Absolutely. I am obsessed with the human voice and love teaching and performing. Other than just loving travel, I specifically chose this business since the schedule is flexible and can work around my singing and teaching. I am a perpetually early riser, so this gives me something productive, and fun, to do with my morning time! I will actually be teaching a lot in the coming year, although I might have to find a balance of the two in subsequent years. I will be teaching at The Lovett School, a private school in Atlanta where the auditioned choir students are required to take voice lessons. I'll also be teaching at Pebblebrook High School, a renowned performing arts magnet school near Atlanta, as well as United Music Studios in Cumming, GA, owned by NATS member Amy Little. Finally, I will be teaching part-time at Georgia State University-Perimeter College. I am always pursuing recital, oratorio, and master class opportunities, as well!

Inter Nos: In this day and age when anyone can book their own travel on their laptop or iPhone, what kinds of services can you offer?

J.P.: That really is the big question, and I think it is my first task in educating people. To put it simply, a travel advisor is not a booking agent. My job is to advise people how to plan a trip that will make the most of their time and money. I am there for clients to navigate all of the possibilities, to make them aware of new possibilities, and help them with any complications along the way. Also, Travelex International is a member of Virtuoso, a consortium of carefully vetted international travel suppliers and agencies. In addition to flights and hotels, we are partnered with experts worldwide who help us to find the best accommodations, experiences, and restaurants. Also, if a client books airfare through my agency and a flight is canceled, the agency will handle rebooking, likely before other passengers know about it. It's kind of like doing taxes, but so much more fun! Anyone can do their own

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taxes, but if you want convenience and peace of mind, you hire a good accountant. If you want convenience and peace of mind for travel, you hire a good travel advisor.

Inter Nos: Do you mostly arrange travel for individuals or for performing groups?

So far, most of my work has been with individuals. I am in the early planning stages of arranging a European tour for my church choir, and I am actively pursuing groups. As with any business, I generally prefer to find smaller businesses with friendly, personalized service, and that is what I will offer to my clients.

Much of my philosophy about life can be summed up in little quotes I have picked up. "Make it work" is one. Another is a spin on "You can't have your cake and eat it too." I like to find out how much cake I can have and still eat some! Hopefully these thoughts will benefit my clients.

Inter Nos: What do you want people to know about the value of seeing other places and cultures?

I believe that the world is changed in small ways. In singing, my intent (other than singing beautifully and communicating

the text) is to change people, even if it just makes part of their day better. Regarding travel, I think Mark Twain said it best: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." I learn something about the world, and about myself, with every trip I take. Just as every human has a story and something to offer, so does every place.

Jonathan Pilkington, tenor, performs frequently as a recitalist and oratorio soloist. He

is also an experienced professional choral singer

and has performed operatic and music theater roles. He

holds degrees from Shorter College (B.M.), Westminster

Choir College (M.M.), and the University of Georgia

(D.M.A.). He is a former Assistant Professor of Music

at Piedmont College, and now teaches at The Lovett

School, United Music Studios, Perimeter College-Georgia

State University, and Cobb

Center for Excellence in the Performing Arts (Pebblebrook High School, in addition to his own private voice studio. He was selected

to participate in the highly selective NATS Intern Program in 2009 and competed further training at the LoVetri Institute for Somatic

Voicework™ at Baldwin Wallace University. Dr. Pilkington serves as the NATS District Governor for Georgia. He is a professional travel

advisor with Pilkington Travels, LLC. JonathonPilkington.net

