Richard III and the Invention of the Editorial

Matthew Hoch



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In this article, Matthew Hoch provides a brief overview of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma's collected commentaries written during his long tenure as editor in chief of the *Journal of Singing*. He credits Sjoerdsma with establishing the editorial as a regular fixture in the journal and recounts the numerous features inaugurated under his editorship. Hoch remarks on the unique nature of the editorial in the field of voice pedagogy, crediting Sjoerdsma as the inventor of the genre as we know it today.

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Soon after being named editor in chief of the *Journal of Singing*, I became aware of a commemorative book lovingly crafted by longtime JOS production manager Laura Carter. This hardcover volume, titled *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, was presented to our editor in chief emeritus upon his retirement in 2023.[1] NATS graciously provided a copy to me, and over the next several months, I slowly worked my way through the 273-page tome. Sjoerdsma was editor in chief for a long time (more than twenty-two years), so this meant a lot of reading—111 commentaries in total. While I had read many of the more recent ones, I decided to start at the very beginning, which—as Julie Andrews might say—is a very good place to start.

RICHARD DALE SJOERDSMA'S COMMENTARIES: AN OVERVIEW AND RETROSPECTIVE

Sjordsma's first commentary appeared in the last issue of volume 57—May/June of 2001—the first issue he fully produced after beginning the position of editor on January 1 of that year.[2] At the time, according to Sjoerdsma, editorial commentary was not a regular occurrence in the *Journal of Singing*—former editors only weighed in occasionally when they felt the urge to write and if the content of the journal called for it.[3] Although he was initially undecided on the frequency of an editor's commentary, Sjoerdsma was ultimately the first editor in chief who chose to pen editorials for each and every issue.[4] Turning to his friend, colleague, and former editor of the journal Richard Miller for advice on this matter, Sjoerdsma recollects the following:

> I wanted . . . to include an "Editor's Commentary" column as a more or less regular feature of the publication. Richard liked the concept, but he sagely cautioned against turning the venue into a bully pulpit. I think I managed to avoid pontification, although this editorial may cross the line—or at least nod in that direction.[5]

The reader might initially feel the above quotation is either unnecessary or perhaps ran a sentence too long, but there was a reason I chose this excerpt, as

it reveals two "themes" that permeate Sjoerdsma's early editorials. The first is his acute awareness that he was building upon the tradition of his predecessors, whose work Sjoerdsma respected and revered. This is perhaps best exemplified in his friendship and collegial relationship with Miller, who served as editor from 1980 to 1987, overseeing the 1985 title transition from *The NATS Journal* to the *Journal of Singing*.[6] From 2002 to 2007, Miller also served as the founding associate editor of the Voice Pedagogy column. Sjoerdsma was keenly aware of his good fortune to have a former editor on his staff upon whom he could rely for wisdom and counsel.[7] The third sentence of this excerpt is perhaps more important, as it is representative of Sjoerdsma's formulation and development of an editorial philosophy during the early years of his editorship: What should be the scope and boundaries of an editorial? What is appropriate content and what is not? These are questions, among others, with which Sjoerdsma continued to grapple in his early writings.

In addition to editorials not being a regular fixture in the *Journal of Singing* prior to his tenure, Sjoerdsma expanded upon their nature, writing on thematic topics as opposed to simply recounting the contents of issues or the minutia of the production process (although this continued to occur, albeit more sparingly). Sjoerdsma also inaugurated the practice of titling his editorials, bringing them more firmly into the territory of being articles in their own right:

> In most periodicals, the editor's jottings typically draw attention to, comment upon, or elaborate upon articles contained in that particular publication, and perhaps announce forthcoming material. Mine tend to be writings on a theme, some rather personal, I'm afraid, especially those that dealt with my medical events of the past year. These essays remained untitled until John Burgin, who initiated and managed the Journal Index before retiring from that responsibility, suggested that, to provide easier cataloging, I create titles for the editorials.[8]

The first editorial to have its own title was "Singing Silence" (vol. 63, no. 2).[9] While the following three articles resumed the former (titleless) trend, titles resumed in the first issue of the following volume (vol. 64, no.1) and have been a feature of *Journal of Singing* editorials ever since.[10]

As issues turned into volumes and volumes into years, additional themes, tendencies, and idiosyncrasies abound. Sjoerdsma loved to wish his readers a "Happy New Year" twice each year: once in the September/October issue (heralding a new volume of the *Journal of Singing*) and once again in January/February to mark the new calendar year.[11] Celebrating World Voice Day became another yearly landmark; Sjoerdsma would almost always pen an essay reflective of that year's theme in the March/April issue of each volume. Personal confessions also found their way into print, sometimes with anguished transparency. Sjoerdsma recounts his journey as a "recovering Dutch Calvinist," discusses his early struggles with smoking and drinking (and triumph over those addictions), and rails against the gentle horrors and potential (catastrophic) consequences of the technological age.[12] One of the most humorous passages on this latter topic is the following:

> Everywhere I look, I see people looking down at handheld devices—alas, even while aiming ("driving" is hardly an appropriate verb form) an automobile. In addition to a paucity of communication and a shrinking ability and/or proclivity to communicate, I sense an increasing lack of cognitive activity (apps give answers to all; all receive the same answers), creative thinking, memory, and imagination. Where this could lead staggers the brain.[13]

And what writer or associate editor who has worked with our editor in chief emeritus could forget, "*-al*, *-ic*, *-cal*," the title of perhaps his most (in)famous editorial?[14] Sjoerdsma's well-argued position on what many would consider to be pedantic grammatical minutia reveals a topic upon which he obviously spent many years ruminating until a fully developed philosophy emerged. Even at the end of his long editorial career, I heard him utter decidedly (and with a hint of frustration with the philistine masses) on more than one occasion: "most *-ic* endings are not improved with *-al*."[15] He believed in that mantra and expected us to as well.

Perhaps most striking to me from an editor's perspective was Sjoerdsma's love of language. Reading the commentaries as a collective whole, his erudition as a reader and aficionado of Western literature—especially poetry, across multiple languages—ranges from impressive to staggering.[16] Although I love what I do and fully embrace my professional identity as an editor, one of my greatest

regrets is that editing is so time-consuming that I struggle to find the time to read. Sjoerdsma clearly was able to achieve a balance between these two inextricably linked activities.[17] In his later years, his penchant for dropping foreign-language phrases within commentaries and occasionally as titles sometimes required me to cheerfully brush up on my German, Latin, or French—Dick's languages of choice.[18] In subtle homage, the choice to title my first editor's commentary with an adverbial phrase from Latin ("In Medias Res") was an intentional nod to Sjoerdsma's predilection toward this tendency.[19]

Some of Sjoerdsma's most poignant editorials occurred in the final volume he edited, from the announcement of his decision to step down as editor in chief to his official retirement one year later. The initial announcement was the subject of his May/June 2022 editorial, aptly titled "A Time to . . ."

> I announce my decision to relinquish my position as Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Singing*. I do so with some regret, having greatly enjoyed what will have been a term of 22 years at the helm of a distinguished journal. Yet, in view of both advancing age and expanding technological challenges, it appears to be the right time to step aside. . . . Meanwhile, I have a new publication cycle to prepare, and five more "Editor's Commentary" columns to write, a couple of which are certain to be valedictory in nature and content.[20]

And "valedictory in nature" they were. It would be an exercise in futility to try to summarize these final columns in a few sentences, so I will not attempt to do so; any words of mine would fail to capture their essence. But I encourage the reader to seek out Sjoerdsma's volume 79 commentaries and reflect upon them.[21] Fittingly, the last ("Ade!," published in May/June of 2023) serves as the editor's farewell, ending with an excerpt from Wilhelm Müller's poem "Die böse Farbe," a lyric which, in Sjoerdsma's words, is "immortalized in Schubert's cycle, *Die schöne Müllerin*."

Ade, ade! und reiche mir	Adieu, adieu! and give me
Zum Abschied deine Hand!	In parting your hand![22]

Finally, I would like to mention another impact these editorials had upon me, more personal in nature but nevertheless an unexpected evocation that resonated deeply: Reading Sjoerdsma's collective commentaries in sequence provides the chronology of an era, namely two of the most formative decades of my life, spanning from when I was beginning my master's degree through my promotion to professor at Auburn University. September 11, 2001, occurred not long after Sjoerdsma assumed his editorship, and he wrote contemplatively on this catastrophic occurrence; at this moment, I was sitting in one of my first days of class (graduate conducting—I remember clearly) at the Hartt School.[23] Not long after that event, his editorials were written against the backdrop of the Iraq War, which began in 2003, the first year of my NATS membership.[24] I continued on, reading columns that were written and published during my fledgling year as a thirty-year-old assistant professor at Shorter College and the following years during which my three children were born. I recalled Scott McCoy's Voice Pedagogy columns written during that era and how profoundly they influenced me as a young member of NATS.[25] And the commentaries continued on, through the volumes in which my first articles were published, promotion and tenure at my university, my invitation to edit a book series for NATS, the dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic, and my eventual appointment, in 2022, as a member of Dick's staff as associate editor of the Voice Pedagogy column (succeeding Scott). Although Sjoerdsma retired only one year later, I am grateful to have had that year serving the *Journal of Singing* under his editorship. I suspect my experience is not unique; many NATS members of a certain age would have their own reminiscences of the era reflected and captured through Sjoerdsma's 111 editorials.

I saw Dick for the first time after his retirement at the 2024 NATS Convention in Knoxville. After the usual exchange of pleasantries, I asked him how he was doing. His first three words were, "I miss it. . . ." We miss him too.

CONCLUSION: "THE OTHER RICHARD"

In the September/October 2016 issue of the *Journal of Singing*, Sjoerdsma penned an editorial titled "The Other Richard."[26] This article was a tribute to NATS's third president, Richard DeYoung, who headed our organization from 1948 to 1950 and wrote a book and several important pamphlets on various matters of voice pedagogy.[27] Sjoerdsma called DeYoung—in his words, "decidedly not pejoratively"—the "other Richard" to

distinguish him from his friend, mentor, and NATS giant Richard Miller.[28]

To my generation, however, Richard Dale Sjoerdsma is the "other Richard." For the first two decades of my career, his name was synonymous with the *Journal of Singing*. He is the shaper of our concept of JOS and how we have come to know it—the model of what a peer-reviewed voice pedagogy journal should look like and be. As the youngest of the three Richards, I would like to dub him (decidedly, not pejoratively) "Richard III." If he is reading this commentary, I ask for his forgiveness for the title he now inadvertently shares with one of England's more sensational monarchs—as well as one of Shakespeare's most celebrated plays.

Continuing Sjoerdsma's observance of editorial titles and their value, I would like to conclude by sharing the inspiration behind the title of this commentary. As I was crafting it in my mind, I was reminded of an enjoyable book I read some twenty-five years ago by the literary critic and public intellectual Harold Bloom titled *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*.[29] The title is deliberately provocative—Shakespeare obviously did not "invent" human beings—but intends to convey that, in Bloom's view, Shakespeare's depiction of human qualities represented a profound advancement and something completely new to Western literature. Shakespeare's writing set a new standard toward which his contemporaries and future writers would aspire for generations to come.

Although Sjoerdsma did not "invent" the genre writ large, he likewise established the format, vision, and purpose of the editorial in the field of voice pedagogy; and, perhaps more important, what such a column means, can be, and is. His 111 commentaries, contemplated as a collective whole, comprise the structural core of a philosophy behind the *Journal of Singing*. They provide a wealth of riches for me and future editors in chief to digest and aspire toward. May we do our best to follow in Richard Dale Sjoerdsma's large, well-read, and long-traveled footsteps.

NOTES

1. Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma* (National Association of Teachers of Singing, 2023).
2. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 1; "Editor's Commentary," *Journal of Singing* 57, no. 5 (2001): 3. Although Sjoerdsma's name appeared at the top of the masthead of the *Journal of Singing* beginning with volume 57, no. 3 (January/February 2001), the May/June issue (vol. 57, no. 5) was the first he fully produced as editor. Sjoerdsma would not be given the title of editor in chief until the first issue of volume 59 in 2022. See Matthew Hoch, "Fundamental Laws and Pedagogic Precepts: A *Journal of Singing* Retrospective," *Journal of Singing* 82, no. 2 (2025): 133–37, https://doi.org/10.53830/sing.00163.
3. On this topic, Sjoerdsma wrote the following: " . . . although the Editor does not presume to pontificate or even to pretend to have something significant to say with any frequency, an 'Editor's Commentary' column, with the reader's indulgence, may appear more or less regularly as a vehicle for sundry ruminations." Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 3; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editor's Commentary," *Journal of Singing* 58, no. 1 (2001): 3.
4. Reflecting on the frequency of his editorials over the years, Sjoerdsma wrote the following in 2014: "For better or for worse—I leave that to the reader—it has been more rather than less." Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 149; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editor's Commentary," *Journal of Singing* 70, no. 3 (2014): 282.
5. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 17; *Journal of Singing*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2003): 195.
6. During Miller's editorship, Sjoerdsma was editor of the Bookshelf column for both *The NATS Journal* and the *Journal of Singing*, a position he held for almost three decades (1972 to 2001).
7. Sjoerdsma honored Miller with a Festschrift issue of the *Journal of Singing* in January/February 2007 (vol. 63, no. 3). At the time of the publication of this article, Miller is the only figure in the journal's history to have received a Festschrift.
8. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 149; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editors and Editorials," *Journal of Singing* 70, no. 3: 282.
9. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 59–61; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Singing Silence," *Journal of Singing* 63, no. 2: 131–32.
10. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 69–71; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "When I Survey . . . ," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 1 (2007): 5–7.
11. Sjoerdsma would remark that the two events seemed simultaneous to him, as his editorials were always due up to four months prior to publication.

12. While this self-deprecating reference is made multiple times throughout Sjoerdsma's commentaries, the following three quotations are worthy of citation: "Virtually all newspersons in the field assure their anchors that they are 'absolutely right' in their pithy analyses, a cheapening of a quality that I personally (especially as a recovering Calvinist) never have experienced and of a word that should find only rare occasion"; Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 75; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "*-al*, *-ic*, *-ical*," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 3 (2008): 270; "This admittedly has been a huge undertaking, consuming a great deal of time and energy. It has also been fun, insofar as a recovering Dutch Calvinist can experience 'fun' and not consider it a synonym for 'sin' "; Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 216; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Heritage and Heroes," *Journal of Singing* 76, no. 1 (2019): 9; "Good (recovering) Dutch Calvinist that I am, I am prone—perhaps even obligated—to internalize others' self-accusations, a propensity on this occasion exacerbated by my own rather mottled odyssey of voice study"; Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 265; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Mots Tristes," *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 3 (2023): 289. Sjoerdsma's journey to overcome his smoking and drinking habits may be found on the following pages: Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 200, 206; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "To Cherish Is a Choice," *Journal of Singing* 74, no. 4 (2018): 378; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "If Walls Could Talk . . . ," *Journal of Singing* 75, no. 2 (2018): 120.
13. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 152; Richard Sjoerdsma, "Continuing Education," *Journal of Singing* 70, no. 5 (2014): 515.
14. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 74–76; Sjoerdsma, "*-al*, *-ic*, *-ical*," 269–71. Within the author's prose, the word "(in)famous" is applied affectionately.
15. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 233; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Corrigo, ergo sum," *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 2 (2020): 144.
16. During Sjoerdsma's tenure as editor in chief, it was not unusual to find poetic fragments on various thematic topics strewn throughout each issue of the *Journal of Singing*; this practice was borne out of a desire to fill "blank spaces"—an unavoidable byproduct of the design process—with meaningful content.
17. Early in his editorial tenure, Sjoerdsma wrote the following: "Indeed, what does an editor do? Without identifying all of the particulars, during a recitation of which almost certainly the listener's eyes would glaze over and minds begin to wander, I can respond with a single word: read. Obviously, a continuing supply of manuscripts provides editors with a large body of reading material. But for me, poring over a manuscript has as little to do with reading in the sense that I mean as does identifying tone-row permutations in a Webern cantata with an aesthetic perception of the piece. An editor must read widely outside his narrow area of expertise: novels, short stories, poetry, essays, plays, biographies, manuals, treatises. In *The Elements of Editing* . . . Arthur Plotnik suggests that working with words and mastering syntax may come from spending twenty-five years of one's life in a drawing room with E. B. White, Vladimir Nabokov, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Saul Bellow, Eudora Welty, James Baldwin, and John Updike—or 'by reading their works and those of other writers whose choice of words and word arrangement establishes . . . standards of literate communication'." Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 9; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editor's Commentary," *Journal of Singing* 58, no. 4 (2002): 279. Indeed, the act, art, and importance of reading is such a pervasive theme throughout Sjoerdsma's commentaries that it would be impractical to list his numerous other meditations on this topic.
18. Sjoerdsma's editorials with foreign-language titles (or phrases within them) include the following: Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 72–73, 119–20, 183–85, 226–28, 232–36, 243–45, 271–73; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Leid, Leid, and "Leidmotif'," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 2 (2007): 137–38; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Auf (m)einer Wandering," *Journal of Singing* 68, no. 1 (2011): 3–4; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Really eine holde Kunst?," *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 4 (2017): 365–66; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Auris Vermis—Earworms," *Journal of Singing* 76, no. 5 (2020): 513–15; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Corrigo, ergo sum," *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 2 (2020): 143–45; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma. "Spero, ergo sum," *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 3: 307–8; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Plus ça change . . . ," *Journal of Singing* 78, no. 1 (2021): 3–5, https://doi.org/10.53830/NBPC5444; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Ade!," *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 5 (2022): 569–71, https://doi.org/10.53830/XOND2487. Note the increased clustering of such titles and phrases toward the end of Sjoerdsma's editorship.
19. Matthew Hoch, "In Medias Res," *Journal of Singing* 82, no. 1 (2025): 7–9, https://doi.org/10.53830/sing.00145.
20. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 256–57; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "A Time to . . . ," *Journal of Singing* 78, no. 5 (2022): 555–56, https://doi.org/10.53830/EDIP3439.

21. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 259–73; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "A Little Lower Than the Angels," *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 1 (2022): 5–7, https://doi.org/10.53830/CWPO7163; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editors, Editing, Editorials," *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 2 (2022): 141–43, https://doi.org/10.53830/PFWH8321; Sjoerdsma, "Mots Tristes," 289–91, https://doi.org/10.53830/JIXI6118; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Your Voice Matters," *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 4 (2022): 433–35, https://doi.org/10.53830/YTYS9445; Sjoerdsma, "Ade!"
22. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 273; Sjoerdsma, "Ade!," 571.
23. For Sjoerdsma's contemporaneous commentary on the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, see Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 7–8; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editor's Commentary," *Journal of Singing* 58, no. 3 (2002): 199–200. Sjoerdsma again reflects on this topic in his twentieth-anniversary column: Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 240; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "A Retrospective on 20 Years," *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 5 (2021): 587–89.
24. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 34; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Editor's Commentary," *Journal of Singing* 60, no. 5 (2004): 431.
25. Scott McCoy managed the Voice Pedagogy column as associate editor from 2007 to 2022, writing thirty-five of the seventy-five articles published during this timeframe. An additional ten editorials were written during McCoy's term as NATS president (2008 to 2010).
26. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 179–80; Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "The Other Richard," *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 1 (2016) : 5–6.
27. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 179–80; Sjoerdsma, "The Other Richard," 5–6. Sjoerdsma proceeded to publish four of DeYoung's (long out-of-print) pedagogical pamphlets over the course of the next six issues of the *Journal of Singing*: Richard DeYoung, "The Singer's Culture," *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 2 (2016): 211–14; Richard DeYoung, "The Singer's Imagination," *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 3 (2017): 325–27; Richard DeYoung, "The Singer's Goal," *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 4 (2017): 435–37; Richard DeYoung, "The Art of Performance: Song Interpretation," *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 5 (2017): 553–55; Richard DeYoung, "The Art of Performance: Song Interpretation (continued)," *Journal of Singing* 74, no. 1 (2017): 95–97; Richard DeYoung, "The Art of Performance: Song Interpretation (concluded)," *Journal of Singing* 74, no. 2 (2017): 221–24.
28. Sjoerdsma, *The Collected Editor's Commentaries of Richard Dale Sjoerdsma*, 179; Sjoerdsma, "The Other Richard," 5.
29. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (Riverhead Books, 1998).

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