

Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

A Retrospective on 20 Years



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Memory, hither come,
And tune your merry notes . . .
William Blake, "Song: Memory, hither come"

CONTINUED CORONA CONFINEMENT OCCASIONED a recent jaunt through the DVD set *Genius*, a brilliant PBS National Geographic biopic on Albert Einstein and his journey toward the theory of relativity. In the film, he discourses on several occasions concerning the relativity of time with illustrations that are easily understood for those of us with limited scientific grasp, and the concept seems particularly apt as with this issue I mark my 20th anniversary as Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Singing*.

Several years ago, as I offered a eulogy at my late brother's funeral, I spoke about the eight year time differential between us. At ages 4, 6, or 8, that span is huge, offering little commonality or companionship with an elder sibling who could do so many things and had such different interests. As we matured, age differences became correspondingly less significant, until our later years, when the gap had no meaning at all, and we grew ever closer as fraternal aging males.

Similarly, when I assumed the position some 20 years ago as the ninth full time editor of this journal, I had no thoughts about two decades ahead—indeed, such projection would have been overwhelming at that juncture. In fact, the venerable Harvey Ringel's quarter century tenure as editor (1955–1980) seemed a veritable lifetime. From my present perspective, however, those years seem but a heartbeat.

Previous editions of this column have recorded my journey to the editorship, how, due to a full plate of administrative duties and quite content to continue to write the "Bookshelf" column, I refused an invitation to become a candidate for the position upon the unexpected death of then editor James McKinney, and also how, following the 2000 NATS Conference in Philadelphia, and upon the resignation of Kathleen Wilson, the offer was tendered again. Since opportunity rarely knocks twice, much less three times, this invitation was one that I could not refuse. My name first appeared as editor on the masthead page of the January/February 2001 *Journal of Singing* (Vol. 57, no. 3), although I had nothing at all to do with its content or production. Similarly, I had little responsibility for the March/April 2001 issue (Vol. 57, no. 4), except to render final proofing. The first issue for which I was fully responsible was that for May/June 2001 (Vol. 57, no. 5), and my first full publication cycle began with Volume 58 (September/October 2001).

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That inaugural cycle (2001–2002) was eventful, to say the least, especially to a novice editor struggling to find footing and direction in an unfamiliar and rather daunting turn in his career. Although in the previous issue (May/June 2001), I had introduced myself in a column simply called “Editorial,” Volume 58, number 1 saw the first “Editor’s Commentary,” in which I professed “while not to presume to pontificate or even pretend to have something significant to say with any frequency, [a] column may appear more or less regularly as a vehicle for sundry ruminations.” That same issue saw the first appearance of the column “NATS Visits AATS,” which was a reworked statement by the Academy from 1929, “Reasons for Studying Singing.”

On July 20, 2001, I received a manuscript, “A New Ensemble Repertoire: Voice and Percussion,” by Cheryl Boyd Weddell. The submission was accepted with a few suggestions for revision, and awaited eventual publication. As the deadline approached and communication ceased, I called the telephone number entered on the Author Affiliation/Permission to Publish form, and was stunned to learn from her husband that Cheryl was recently deceased. Regrettably, her article, a worthy contribution to the literature, was never published. Similar instances have occurred over the years, but the impact of this shock early in my tenure remains etched in memory.

Then, of course, on September 11, 2001, the unthinkable happened. The September/October *Journal of Singing* already had been mailed, and the November/December issue was at the printer. Then NATS President Roy Delp and I literally had to stop the presses in order to publish a joint statement on behalf of the Association and journal in response to the tragedy. Finally, late in 2001, I received notice from Singular Publishing Group, for a number of years the publisher for the *Journal of Singing*, determined to drop us as a client, forcing us to look elsewhere for our publication needs. Executive Director William Vessels forwarded to me a brochure from Modern Litho-Print in Jefferson City, Missouri, and, following my visit and interview there, we subsequently engaged them to print and distribute the journal. Serendipitously, during my visit MLP sales agent Ed Zagorac had arranged a meeting between me and Laura Carter, owner and manager of Carter Publishing Studio, who, beginning with the September/October 2002 (Vol.

59, no. 1) issue, since has been our gifted graphics artist responsible for layout and design.

And that was my first year!

The 2002 NATS Conference in San Diego was my first as editor. I remember walking through the hotel lobby with Scott and Marcia McCoy and being approached by a NATS member who asked if I were the editor of the journal. A feeling of paranoiac anxiety set in: How do I answer? Why does this person want to know? What did I do? Can I safely admit it? Happily, that early lack of confidence—which, incidentally, has not entirely disappeared—was considerably ameliorated at our annual business meeting with a resolution of which I remain proud.

Resolution #3 at the NATS 2002 San Diego Convention Business Meeting

Whereas, members of the Association should begin receiving their *Journal of Singing* on time; whereas, said *Journal* should finally be free from error; whereas, the *Journal* has an entirely new structure and format; and, whereas, the expertise and increased involvement of its Editor-in-Chief has made possible the substitution of a printer for a publisher, **be it resolved** that the National Association of Teachers of Singing expresses its gratitude and congratulations to Richard D. Sjoerdsma on the one-year anniversary of his appointment as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Singing*.

Submitted by the Resolutions Committee: Jean W. Gregg, Chair; Leslie Holmes and Jennifer Edwards.

(Regarding the first “whereas”: Some readers will remember that the journal typically would arrive early in the *second* month of the period covered, by which time some material—especially announcements and advertisements—would already be out of date.)

The journey of the past 20 years has resulted in 100 issues of the *Journal of Singing*, more than 300 feature articles, some 1600 regularly recurring columns, and millions of words. As I reflect on this journey, certain high points emerge, some seemingly trivial, but all of personal and professional importance.

- It was also at the San Diego conference that, sponsored by my friend and mentor Richard Miller, I was privileged with acceptance into the American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS).

- Almost immediately upon my assuming the editorship, Richard Miller sent me a printer's woodblock of the journal title page when it was called simply *The Bulletin* (thus between 1944–1962) and the former NATS logo, a treasure that remains on my desk today.
- Unhappy with the dated font and cover design that displayed journal content, I along with Laura Carter worked on a redesign that resulted in its present clean, professional appearance, for which Laura is principally responsible.
- About the same time, I reorganized the journal, expanding the number of associate editors and Editorial Board members, and revamping its content.
- The 80th birthday of Richard Miller was acknowledged in a *Festschrift* issue (Vol. 63, no. 3; January/February 2007), another “first” in this journal's history; it was a celebration of this remarkable man's accomplishments and contributions to voice pedagogy and science.
- I was particularly pleased with the Anniversary Issue (Vol. 76, no. 1; September/October 2019) to com-

memorate 75 years of NATS existence and leadership. It was fascinating to excavate the archives in search of historical material to flesh out this document. It was a impressive team effort from all of my contributors.

- During my visit to the BDG (Bundesverband Deutscher Gesangspädagogen) Kongress in Essen in 2005, I met and developed a friendship with Sibrand Basa, the first editor of the soon to be published *Vox Humana*. I was pleased to be able to contribute to the planning and format of the periodical, which has become the official organ of EVTA (European Voice Teachers Association).
- Another high point—one that is a continuous elevation, if that doesn't ruin the metaphor—is my association with and gratitude to a host of highly competent voice professionals. Those include my regular contributors, past and present, Editorial Board members, NATS officers, and the eleven NATS presidents under whom it has been my privilege to serve.
- The pinnacle, however, in this panorama of peaks, remains the periodical's position at the leading edge of the world of the act and art of singing.

In my first editorial, I reported that in the application and interview process prior to having been appointed to the position, I submitted to the Search Committee (Wm. McIver, chair; Richard Miller; Roy Delp; Vernon Yenne) that “my vision for the *Journal of Singing* is to help it become the best that it can be, addressing the various needs of the readers it serves and reflecting the thinking of the best scientific and pedagogic minds past and present.” That vision remains firmly in place today, as does my gratitude to you, dear reader, for your support and trust in permitting me to serve as Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Singing*.

Journal Editors

Homer Mowe (1944–1948)
 Leon Carson (1948–1955)
 Harvey Ringel (1955–1980)
 Richard Miller (1980–1987)
 James McKinney (1987–1998)
 Carol Kimball (*pro tem*; 1998–1999)
 Kathleen Wilson (1999–2000)
 Richard Sjoerdsma (2001–)

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Membership:

Membership in the National Association of Teachers of Singing is open to any citizen of any country whose professional training and experience qualifying him or her as a teacher of singing.

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Affiliate Membership is open to persons or groups that are interested in vocal pursuits but are not actually involved in the teaching of singing, such as speech therapists, laryngologists, schools, publishers, and music stores.

Publications:

Membership includes a subscription to the *Journal of Singing*, the official journal of NATS, and to *Inter Nos*, the NATS Newsletter.

Information:

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Visit the Membership section of nats.org to learn more.