

A Time To...

Richard Dale Sjoerdsma



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To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose
under the heaven . . .

Ecclesiastes 3:1

ANSWER: Stephen Breyer, Tom Brady, and Richard Dale Sjoerdsma.
QUESTION: What three public personages announced their retirement during the same week in late January?

Any *Jeopardy* contestant would be able immediately to identify two-thirds of the correct response, but assuredly would puzzle over the missing piece, perhaps frantically hurling wildly erroneous guesses before the buzzer sounded. Justice Breyer's decision had an immediate seismic impact on American politics and the judicial system that will reverberate far into the future. Star football quarterback Tom Brady's retirement jarred the arena of professional sports (and apparently has recently been retracted). The (not so public) *Journal of Singing* Editor in Chief's announcement may have caused a ripple in a household or two. The first two announcements were widely publicized in national headlines; the latter one was quietly expressed in a letter to the Executive Director of the association that publishes the periodical and of which the editor is a member.

I trust that readers will forgive a lighthearted lead-in to a most serious matter: 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.

It was a difficult, even painful decision, although one that is, in fact, somewhat anticlimactic. You may recall from previous editions of this column the challenges I encountered resulting from an aggressive radiation therapy undertaken to address a malignant lymph node with expansion that was removed from my neck. Although the radiation oncologist did his best to minimize laryngeal damage, my singing voice was compromised to some degree, and I have not sung professionally since 2013.¹ Other complications were less permanent, but nevertheless contributed to the despair that caused me to consider it to be a contradiction to lead a scholarly journal for professional voice practitioners. I discussed relinquishing the position with Executive Director Allen Henderson and a few close friends and family members, but ultimately I concluded that it was essentially an emotional response and

didn't act upon it. Now, however, my decision is more deliberate, but assuredly not dispassionate.

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act IV, Scene 3, Brutus, conversing with fellow conspirator Cassius, offers an early expression of *carpe diem*.

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, when taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea we are now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

I think that, in late 2000, I took the tide of opportunity at its flood. Upon return from the 2000 NATS Philadelphia Conference, I found a communication from NATS President-Elect Bill McIver suggesting that I consider applying for the position of *Journal of Singing* editor vacated by its current holder. A few years earlier, following the death of editor James McKinney, I had been asked to enter candidacy for his position, but expanding responsibilities at Carthage College rendered that inadvisable. Second opportunities present themselves only infrequently, third opportunities almost never; consequently, I threw my proverbial hat in the ring and was eventually appointed. The result was a career change that has brought huge satisfaction and rewards at many levels personal and professional.

Ah, but it's important to remember that tides ebb as well as flood, which I note particularly in two areas that affect my decision: biological and technological.

In contemplative moments, I often think of the text to Gerald Finzi's song, "The Sigh." The last verse of Thomas Hardy's poem I have found particularly poignant, inspiring personal retrospection.

It was in our May, remember;
And though now I near November,
And abide
Till my appointed change, unfretting . . .

Thomas Hardy, from "The Sigh"

Having recently attained the status of octogenarian, I probably am in the December of my allotted life span and am increasingly aware of certain life events and changes that may accrue. Currently I am in good health, but that condition cannot be taken for granted, and the unanticipated can occur. A debilitating illness, incapac-

ity, or worse would have significantly negative effects on the journal and NATS. Although I was not directly involved, I remember when editor McKinney suddenly died in 1998 and the chaos that ensued. Carol Kimball stepped in as editor *pro tem* for a short time, while the Association scrambled to search for a new editor, ultimately engaging my immediate predecessor, Kathleen Wilson. Under the current circumstances, NATS will be able to launch a process that will be deliberative, methodic, free from undue pressures or constraints.

A second reason, equal in importance, is technological. As you may have read in a previous "Editor's Commentary," the *Journal of Singing* is moving ahead with a number of technological initiatives to modernize journal editorial and production procedures and to make our periodical more accessible to the wider scholastic community.² Through membership in CrossRef, all materials now are assigned a DOI (digital object identifier), a more accurate citation method that increases the reach and impact of the journal and brings it in line with other scholarly publications.

The other leg of this initiative, ScholarOne Manuscripts™, is not yet in place and is considerably more complicated and time consuming than we had initially thought. While I still consider myself educable and cognitively facile, the extensive training involved for the editor would be better applied to a younger person who would be in place for a longer time, a "digital native" or one of greater technological expertise than I possess.

So here is the plan as we go forward. I intend to stay in position through the next publication cycle, that is, until approximately May 2023. Executive Director Henderson will create a search committee (of which I should not be a member), announce and advertise the position, launch a national search, vet and interview applicants, and subsequently appoint the next editor of the *Journal of Singing*. I would hope to have a few months to mentor that person in order to ensure a smooth transition and acquaint them with the intricacies and idiosyncracies of editorship.

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.

* * *

I am delighted to share with you the appointment of Dr. Matthew Hoch as Associate Editor of the *Journal of Singing* in charge of the "Voice Pedagogy" column, effective with the beginning of the next publication cycle. He succeeds Scott McCoy, who, as you are aware, stepped away from the position last fall. In more than two decades as editor of the journal, having made a number of staffing decisions, changes, and appointments, I can say unhesitatingly that this was the most difficult decision of them all. I was privileged to have a slate of high profile and extraordinarily qualified candidates, several of whom would have served with distinction.

Matt is currently associate professor of voice at Auburn University, as well as choirmaster and minister of music at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Auburn, Alabama. He maintains a multifaceted career as prolific

author, teacher of singing, performer, conductor, and scholar. His name will be familiar to many in the vocal arts community as editor of the NATS sponsored So You Want to Sing series, as well as author and co-author of books in that series. The reader is invited to more fully explore his impressive credentials on the nats.org website. I welcome Matt to my editorial staff and look forward to his valued contributions to NATS and the *Journal of Singing*.

NOTES

1. Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Not to Sing?," *Journal of Singing* 70, no. 2 (November/December 2013): 145–146.
2. Richard Dale Sjoerdsma, "Plus ça change . . .," *Journal of Singing* 78, no. 1 (September/October 2021): 3–5; <https://doi.org/10.53830/NBPC5444>.



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