

## **“Centered-Focused-Artistic”** by Roy Sander

In critiquing various vocal performances over the years, I have used three terms repeatedly: *centered*, *focused*, and *artistic vision*. While none of these is exactly arcane, nonetheless I thought I ought to lay out what *I* mean when I use them.

The terms are somewhat interrelated. A centered interpretation is one in which the singer makes a connection with the central meaning of the song; such performances are rooted in an understanding of what the writers are saying. This isn't just an intellectual understanding--both intelligence and artistry are required. The myriad choices that the singer makes in creating the interpretation must reflect and communicate that understanding. Listening to a centered performance, we feel that we are being spoken to as well as sung at.

A focused performance is one in which no moment or gesture deviates from the emotional/interpretive center--no frills for effect, no passages that are merely nicely sung, no time during which the singer's total being appears less than fully committed to what he or she is doing.

Having an artistic vision has two elements: taking a personal point of view on what the song is saying, and developing a blueprint by which the various components of a song combine to make a statement. What is your emotional perspective on the song? For example, "Come Rain or Come Shine" can be done defiantly, or at the other end of the spectrum, as a sweet expression of devoted affection. How do you want the second verse to relate to the first: does it say the same thing but more emphatically, or is it making a different point? *Collaborate* with your musical director. For example, a change in tempo should coincide with a shift in your attitude, and an arrangement shouldn't build unless you want what you are saying to be stronger. And of course, the material, itself, must support your interpretation.

Centered performances command our attention, focused performances hold it, and artistic vision gives us a reason for spending time with you instead of listening to a CD. Without being centered, you are singing the words and music, but not the song. Without focus, you come across as undisciplined or unprofessional. Without an artistic vision, what you are doing might be quite lovely, but it isn't *cabaret* singing.