

CHOOSING A SUMMER PROGRAM: GUIDELINES FOR SINGERS

An important part of a singer's formative training can occur during the summer months, stretching from May to early September. Summer programs usually require a substantial investment of both money and time. The number of summer programs for singers has increased dramatically, both in Europe and in North America, to the extent that it may be difficult to discern the best option for a particular participant.

Given that a number of our members have years of experience managing Young Artist Programs and participating as faculty members, we are taking this opportunity to propose a number of appropriate considerations to assist singers, teachers, and families in making an informed decision.

Above all, applicants are urged to choose a program that has a clear mission statement, spells out policies concerning diversity, equity, and inclusivity, and publishes comprehensive information. Those considering any program first should visit the program's website, especially the FAQ section. Following that, contact should be made with the program directly for information not otherwise available. Prospective students should be aware that summer programs are often flexible with regard to the number of students they accept and the faculty they have in residence. Numbers and people may change between the time of application and the time of arrival.

In making a preliminary decision, a number of areas should be considered.

- location
- time frame and length of stay
- age restrictions (if any)
- specific focus of the program: operatic and/or classical song repertoire, music theater, other
- transparency of curricular offerings and daily schedule
- language study
- performance opportunities
- accommodations for persons with disabilities
- flexibility to choose or decline various aspects of the program, such as voice lessons
- faculty, including which faculty are in residence and for how long, as well as student-teacher ratio
- cost
- receiving credit applicable to a degree program
- opportunities for cultural excursions

The next step is to acquire information concerning the most important aspects of each program.

1. LONGEVITY

- number of years the program has existed
- testimonials from singers who have participated in the program

2. VOICE FACULTY

- names, biographies, professional affiliations
- length of time individual teachers will be in residence at the program

3. VOICE RELATED COURSES AND FACULTY

- body work, such as Yoga, Body Mapping, Feldenkreis, Tai Chi, Alexander Technique, or other disciplines
- stage movement, dance
- acting, scene, and song performance techniques
- theater, voice, and speech

4. NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

- levels offered
- number of hours weekly

5. PERFORMANCE

- repertoire
- recitals, concerts
- venues on and off site
- operatic and/or music theater productions
- scenes programs
- master class participation
- number of singers assigned to one role or scene
- memorization expectations
- timing for receipt of assigned repertoire
- guaranteed public performances for assigned repertoire

6. VOICE LESSONS AND COACHING SESSIONS

- number of weekly voice lessons and coaching sessions
- pianist for lessons and coaching provided by program or paid for by student
- assignment of voice teacher and vocal coach made by program or requested by student

7. MASTER CLASSES

- names and biographies of master class presenters
- manner in which singers are chosen for performance

8. NON-OPERATIC REPERTOIRE

- additional repertoire a singer may study, that is, song literature, chamber music, contemporary commercial music, music theater, or other areas
- for programs outside North America, the possibility of performing in languages other than that of the host country

9. HOUSING

- type of housing offered, such as apartment, dormitory, hotel, host family; choice among single, double, or more room occupancy; private or shared bathroom
- any additional charge for a guest
- availability of kitchen utensils, linens, and other necessities
- proximity to the school or theater
- total cost of housing

10. TRAVEL

- group airline ticketing through program or arranged by participant
- ground transportation to and from airport to program location

11. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- scholarships or work study availability and application deadlines

12. FEES AND PAYMENT PLAN

- extra costs for pianists, books, excursion trips, tickets for performances, and other necessities
- deposit due dates and amount
- circumstances under which the deposit or a portion thereof will be returned
- availability of staggered payment plan
- requirement that all fees must be paid prior to beginning of the program

13. MEDICAL FACILITIES

- availability of easily accessible medical facilities
- need for individual medical insurance plan
- regulations of host country regarding health insurance coverage

Additional sources of information for answers to the above include:*

- YAPTRACKER – an online program listing summer programs, auditions, etc.
- Opera American Singer Training Program, which defines to what level Young Artist Program singers should apply
(<https://operaamerica.org/Files/OADocs/AristResources/ChoosingYAP.PDF>)
- Additional information for singers (<https://operaamerica.org/content/about/artists.aspx>)
- Musical America 2020 Summer Programs Guide
(<https://www.musicalamerica.com/pages/?pagename=camps2020.main&header>)
- Short summaries of strong music theater programs across the U.S. for high school and pre-college students (<https://mactheatre.com/summer-programs>)
- Guide to pre-college oriented programs
(<https://majoringinmusic.com/summer-music-camps/>)
- Short list of summer college music theater programs
(<https://www.collegemtguide.com/summer-programs>)
- A very positive look at reasons for enrolling in a summer program in music theater
(<https://www.schooltheatre.org/blogs/suzanne-livesay/2019/04/19/why-i-didnt-want-my-students-to>)
- Testimonials from and personal conversations with former students and/or current teachers in the program
- *Classical Singer Magazine*

* These links are provided as a courtesy and are not necessarily endorsed by AATS.

Singers, parents, and teachers considering a summer music program opportunity, with its attendant financial and time commitments, are encouraged to look for a comprehensive, well organized program that responds to questions or concerns in a timely and forthright manner. Such a program may provide a young performer the experience of a lifetime, whether at home or abroad. Finding the optimal situation is well worth the investment of time and effort on the part of all concerned.