

An honest, down to earth guide to better singing.

Singing Secrets: What Every Singer Needs to Know

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SINGING SECRETS

**What Every Singer
Needs to Know**

"A book unlike any other!
A must read for every singer."
Anne Nelson, performer

by Kristina Seleshanko

***Singing Secrets:
What Every Singer Needs to Know.***

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INTRODUCTION

Why another book on singing?

There are many books about singing—some published decades ago, others published a few years ago. Why another book on the topic?

In my experience, both as a singer and as a voice teacher, I've found that older singing books often contain incorrect or dubious information. Newer books about singing frequently omit vital information or are overly-complex. (Learning to sing needn't be complicated, yet many people try to make it so.) On the other hand, this book contains the basics that singers must know in order to be a success, whether they're singing hard rock, classical, or something in-between. And, I hope, these basics are presented in a simple, easy to understand fashion.

Granted, there are areas of singing that are extremely difficult to teach through a book. Frankly, there's no substitute for studying with a teacher, in person. Phone lessons may be somewhat helpful, CDs and DVDs may be useful to a degree, and books can be valuable guides, but nothing takes the place of having a qualified person *watch* and *hear* you *in person*. In addition, beyond a foundational understanding of what good technique is, no two

singers will discover the same “cure” for their singing woes. A good teacher customizes lessons accordingly, creating new ways of explaining things and finding innovative exercises to help individuals reach their goals. In a book, however, the best anyone can do is offer advice on what has worked for many other singers.

Nonetheless, so many people have written to me with questions and concerns about singing, I felt a book would be helpful to getting them on the right track.

In this book, I haven’t limited myself to vocal technique (although that’s certainly an important part of this volume) but have also covered rarely discussed topics such as working with musicians and conductors, style, and other practical details I wish I’d learned from a teacher instead of from the school of hard knocks.

This book covers the basic information I try to give all my students. As I’ve already indicated, lessons vary from student to student, according to their personal needs. However, a good understanding of basic vocal technique is essential to all singers, as is some understanding of vocal anatomy. I don’t try to turn my students into scientists; it isn’t necessary, and tends to be confusing to many people. However, the taste of anatomy I give will, I hope, be enlightening. For those who are medically minded, what’s offered here should be a spring board for researching more information about their bodies.

Once I’ve covered the basics of technique (covered in Part One of this book), I start fine-tuning my students’ voices. Not everyone needs the same

sort of help, but topics that are frequently covered are listed in Part Two of this book. As students become more proficient, we also discuss such things as style, performing, auditioning, et cetera. You'll discover these topics in Part Three. In short, if you follow this book in the order it's given, you'll have a simulation of the lessons I give in person.

Be sure to take each chapter slowly. Trying to focus on too many things at one time will tend to lead to frustration and confusion.

It's my hope *all* singers will benefit from this book. If you're a novice singer who's never taken a voice lesson, this volume should give you a good foundation to build upon. If you've had some lessons but still have "problem areas," this book will probably address them. And if you're an advanced singer, I think you'll find tips and insights you haven't encountered before.

There are a small number of teachers who only accept students who are already fairly accomplished, but I enjoy having students of all levels; frequently, the students who struggle are the most exciting; they constantly challenge me to come up with new ways of explaining things and new exercises to help them achieve positive results. I've had singers come to me who'd been told by other teachers they were tone deaf; I've had actors who could barely carry a tune seek my help; and I've had extremely talented singers come in for coaching, too.

It doesn't matter where your skill level is now or how talented (or not) you consider yourself to be. As I once read:

To own a Stradivarian is an asset, but it doesn't follow that every owner of a fine violin is a good violinist. Similarly, the possession of a beautiful vocal instrument doesn't constitute the entire equipment for a singing career. How can you learn to best "play" whatever instrument you possess? That is the question.

And that's what this book is all about.

PART ONE:

Techniques Every Singer Needs To Know

DIFFERENT METHODS OF SINGING?

“There are those in the teaching industry who’d have you believe there are several ‘methods’ of singing. However, there’s only one real method—the rest are quackery.”

There are those in the teaching industry who’d have you believe there are several “methods” of singing. However, there’s only one real method—the rest are quackery. Through scientific and medical study, today we understand what technique is “correct,” in that it will prevent you from hurting your voice. In this way, modern singers can certainly have better training than famous singers of earlier generations.

So don’t be confused by teachers or studios that tout “XYZ Singing” as the only correct method.

In reality, the difference between what’s taught among knowledgeable instructors is only *how the information is presented*. One teacher describes a certain concept one way, and another teacher (equally knowledgeable) explains it in another way. Neither teacher is more correct than the other. Assuming they are educated about the voice, they are both teaching the “correct method.”

Oftentimes, “discrepancies” in singing methods are only a matter of arguing about what certain words mean.

In particular, there are two extremes in how voice is taught. Some teachers rely heavily on medical and scientific explanations, while other teachers lean heavily on imagery (giving illustrations or visual pictures for students to imagine). Both ways of teaching are acceptable as long as the student understands what’s being taught—but let’s face it; some people are more scientifically minded than others! Some students understand and benefit from knowing the scientific basis behind things. Others just get confused by it. On the other hand, some knowledge of the science behind singing helps students understand *why* certain tricks or exercises work, thereby enabling them to eventually correct their own singing faults.

My own way of teaching is to include a bit of both—science and imagery—although I find that imagery tends to work best for most students. Therefore, that’s mostly what you’ll find in this book.

Not only do I not claim that my way of teaching voice is the *only* correct way to learn, but, unlike a lot of folks distributing books and CDs, I’m honest on another point: This book should not be used as a replacement for a singing teacher. There are people out there who’ll tell you otherwise, but honestly, there’s no good substitute for working with a singing teacher, face to face, one-on-one.

I’ve had many frustrated singers come to me after months of phone lessons, working with a famous CD program, or studying a well-known book. They’re

upset because their progress is slow, they find some things confusing, and they aren't getting the feedback they need.

MYTH BUSTER

“The singers of the Golden Age—Enrico Caruso, Lillie Lehmann, Nellie Melba—knew more about singing than we do today.”

TRUTH: Period accounts reveal that many singers of the Golden Age and earlier were generally sloppy and under-disciplined by modern standards. They were allowed to make changes to the music as suited them, thereby avoiding passages that might be difficult. Recordings (admittedly made at the end of the Age) reveal less than stunning performances in many cases. In addition, most women could not sing properly because they wore corsets, which prevented correct breathing and made support difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, even the greatest singers of the time—like Caruso—knew less about the voice than we do today, because nobody could watch the voice in action as we can today. Science has taken the guesswork out of singing technique.

A good voice teacher will focus on your weak areas and teach you how to correct them. While you might practice at home, repeating over and over flaws that you don't realize are flaws, your voice teacher will spot them immediately and correct you, helping you to get rid of bad habits. A teacher can also see problems in your singing that might not be detectable simply by listening.

In short, this book—or any other aid for singing—is useful (I hope!), but cannot possibly take the place of an in-person voice teacher. So go out and get yourself one!

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