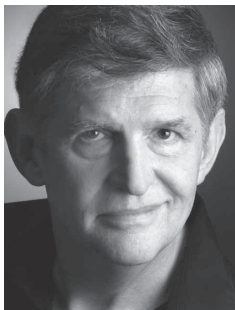


Robert Edwin, Associate Editor

Are We the National Association of Teachers of Classical Singing? (Revisiting 1985)

Robert Edwin



Robert Edwin

AT SOME RECENT WORKSHOPS AND MASTER CLASSES, I've been introduced as a pioneer in Contemporary Commercial Music ("non-classical") and child voice pedagogy. After laboring in the NATS trenches for over twenty six years, the positive recognition of some trend-setting ideas that challenged traditional voice pedagogy is much appreciated. I'm thrilled to see CCM voice science and pedagogy now mainstreamed in many colleges, universities, and independent studios. Since our bandwagon occupancy is continually growing, I thought it might be worthwhile to revisit a time when the bandwagon had a lot fewer riders. May 1985 introduced the very first column in *The NATS Bulletin* dedicated to what was then called "nonclassical" singing and voice pedagogy. Under the banner, "The Bach to Rock Connection," the piece entitled, "Are We the National Association of Teachers of Classical Singing?" asked who we were as an organization. For those of you who were on board with me then, it will be a trip down memory lane. For those of you who are new to the bandwagon, it's a bit of a history lesson. For those who are considering jumping on the vehicle, I've revised the column a bit to reflect twenty-first century references and current JOS practice, but the message still rings true.

(See next page)

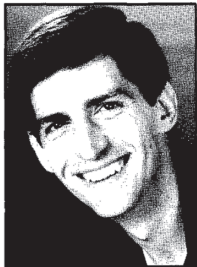
Robert Edwin has served NATS in many capacities—among them: New Jersey Chapter President (1985–92); author of "The Bach to Rock Connection,"—the first regular feature in the *Journal of Singing* dedicated to CCM (nonclassical) voice pedagogy (1985–2002); National Secretary/Treasurer (2002–06); first Master Teacher in the NATS Intern Program to represent the private studio sector (2005); first "wired" master class clinician at a NATS national conference (Nashville 2008); and JOS Associate Editor (2002–present).

Mr. Edwin is a frequent faculty member of the Voice Foundation's Annual Symposium: Care of the Professional Voice, and is an active member of the distinguished American Academy of Teachers of Singing. His DVD on child voice training, *The Kid & the Singing Teacher*, with CCC-SLP Barbara Arboleda, is available at www.VoiceInsideView.com. He is a chapter author for the 2011 Oxford University Press, *Handbook of Music Education*, and his chapter on teaching children appears in the book, *Pediatric Voice Disorders* (Plural Publishing). www.robertedwinstudio.com

Journal of Singing, May/June 2011
Volume 67, No. 5, pp. 589–590
Copyright © 2011
National Association of Teachers of Singing

The *Bach* to Rock Connection

Are We the National Association of Teachers of Classical Singing?



Robert Edwin

What would your response be if a rock and roll singer with an exotic mohawk haircut of many hues knocked on your studio door and asked for voice lessons? Would you say to this rather bizarre-looking person, "Yes, maybe I can help you," or would you be more inclined to say, "I'm sorry, I just wouldn't know what to do with you." Perhaps your response would be, "I'm totally unfamiliar with the repertoire," or "I don't like your kind of singing. It goes against everything I know to be good for the voice."

Whatever the reasoning, I suspect that [TS1] a majority of NATS members have a closed door policy with regard to pop and rock vocalists. As a result, many of these [TS2] nonclassical singers end up in voice studios where sound voice pedagogy is not practiced. This is unfortunate, because singers in the mass music markets want and need help from competent and knowledgeable instructors. NATS members, if they are willing and able, can address that need.

We should start with the premise that all singing styles can have as their foundation, basic [TS3] vocal technic such as the development and coordination of the laryngeal mechanism, freedom from extraneous tensions, extension of range and endurance, resonance coupling, and efficient breath management. With this "basic training" the student is better prepared to channel creative energies into the chosen style of singing.

Since all vocal art forms have their "thrivers," "survivors," and "failures," it is imperative that the teacher be a part of the student's decision-making process. The complex and often fragile interaction between the singer's talent quotient, personality profile, lifestyle, physical health, and career ambition, needs careful analysis.

Those of us in the minority vocal art forms such as opera, oratorio, and recital know, for example, that a Verdi soprano and a Mozart soprano are defined by both voice and temperament, and that a Heldentenor voice without courage and endurance is not a Heldentenor singer. Similar dynamics exist in the majority vocal art forms of musical theater, pop and rock [TS4].

Ethel Merman, Kate Smith, and in more recent years Barbra Streisand, Linda Ronstadt, Pat Benatar, and Cyndi Lauper [TS5] are but a few of the thrivers and survivors who categorically discredit the maxim that belting is bad for all female voices.

Representing the male side, Mick Jagger, Rod Stewart, and Chuck Berry continue [TS6] to roll along years after certain critics declared that their

singing styles would quickly render them totally voiceless. Yet for every young "Annie" who is both physically and emotionally capable of belting out the song "Tomorrow" in the original show key, there exists a young girl whose particular talents and limitations may demand extensive vocal training, a change of key, an entirely different repertoire, or another vocation or hobby.

Since rock and pop music will not go away, nor people's urge to sing it, shouldn't we as well informed and well equipped singing teachers lend our expertise to help increase the number of thrivers and survivors and to diminish the number of failures?

Let's get to the root of the matter. Could you teach vocalists whose singing styles are, by artistic demand, often physically and vocally abusive, without violating your pedagogic standards? Emphatically "No!" if you are ethically and aesthetically opposed to the music, extended chest voice singing, a lack of purity, fullness and dynamics in the voice, a repertoire from less than the masters, and an endless assortment of creative grunts, groans and growls.

If, however, you feel that the aforementioned vocalizations can have validity, do fall within the compass of human artistic expression, and are compelled to help all singers without regard to race, creed, and style of singing, then the answer is an equally emphatic "Yes!"

So do borrow or buy a Pat Benatar, Billy Idol, or Barbra Streisand album [TS7] (you may be intrigued by the heavy metal rockers like Twisted Sister and Kiss, but they may be beyond help) [TS8]. If after listening to them you can modify your pedagogic perspective from exclusive (only certain vocalizations are acceptable) to inclusive (many vocalizations can be acceptable), you may be on your way to providing a great service to some of this country's mass music singers.

Robert Edwin is vice-president of the New Jersey Chapter of NA TS. He teaches privately in Cinnaminson, New Jersey and New York City under the aegis of the Helena W. Monbo Studios and is on the faculty of the New Jersey School of the Arts-Winter Arts Institute. In addition to his role as teacher, Edwin is a professional singer and a published composer and freelance writer.

Dr. Eugen Grabscheid, who now looks after the throats of many singers, used to be chief ear, nose and throat specialist at the Harlem Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital, where he examined thousands of blacks [TS9]. His conclusions concur with those of Dr. Wilbur J. Gould, whose practice also includes many singers. There is no such thing as black vocal cords, both say. The black sound, if there is one, has nothing to do with the size or shape of the nose. Chest and throat cavity size, in blacks and whites alike, has a direct correlation with the size of the voice. Almost always, big voices come from large vocal cords, thick throats (necks), large heads, and these qualities are shared alike among black and white singers. In short, whatever difference there is, it is not physiological.

— Harold C. Schonberg, 1982

MAY / JUNE 1985

Comment [TS1]: In this new decade it should read, "fewer NATS members." We're getting better at this!

Comment [TS2]: Should now read: contemporary commercial music (CCM). "Non-classical" (as well as non-white, and non-Christian) are elitist, demeaning, and should no longer be used.

Comment [TS3]: Add "functional" so that the entire voice system is developed. Add "fact-based" since TA/CT, thick folds/thin folds, M1/M2 all better describe what's actually going on than does chest/head. Can we seek even more clarity in this decade?

Comment [TS4]: Once again, CCM is the umbrella term for other than classical.

Comment [TS5]: And in more recent years, Christina Aguilera, Alicia Keys, and Sutton Foster.

Comment [TS6]: ...continue in their 60s and 80s respectively as of this writing. Add Michael Bolton, Neil Diamond, and a slew of other aging rockers to this ever growing list.

Comment [TS7]: Add Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, the Jonas Brothers, Rihanna, Amy Spanger and ...

Comment [TS8]: Bad and snobby Robert! These guys are great at what they do and are still going strong in 2011!

Comment [TS9]: How profound were these observations back then. Do people really take this as fact even now?