

With a Song in My Psyche: On the Psychology of Singing and Teaching Singing

Pearl Shinn Wormhoudt

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Thorough knowledge of the psychological and physical underpinnings of great singing is essential for voice teachers and for singers at all stages of their careers, whether they are already welcomed on the great stages of the world or just beginning the often laborious climb to peak performance and public recognition. Pearl Shinn Wormhoudt's excellent volume, *With a Song in My Psyche*, takes the mystery out of both success and failure in pursuing one's singing goals and offers voice teachers a well-stocked arsenal of tools and wisdom to successfully help students resolve the issues, both personal and professional, that are critical to their success.

Wormhoudt presents a template for guiding budding musical talent, from descriptions of what happens in the brain of a musician, and what it is that calls certain people to a musical career in the first place, through the developmental stages of the brain, body, and soul, including the critical stages of growth that must be navigated at the correct times in order to achieve the full realization of one's potential.

Although her work is dedicated to singers, and its physiological information is geared to the production of beautiful vocal sound, the principles she expounds are applicable to all musicians. Some of her revelations may surprise readers, including the results of research showing that performing musicians are more likely to be introverted in nature than are teachers of music, and that, rather than favoring the male gender, true creativity is most often found in those who exhibit androgynous traits.

The author's discussion of the importance of the difficult adolescent years to a musician's development will be especially helpful to teachers and to young people who may be struggling to conform to a world which may not appreciate the characteristics they possess. "Not only are the musically gifted strong in intuition and feeling," Wormhoudt writes, "they may share with other gifted adolescents traits of curiosity, good memory, energy, thirst for knowledge, adaptability, sense of humor, imagination, and problem-solving ability."

Wormhoudt elucidates not only what personal qualities, training, and support one needs to develop a healthy, whole musical personality, but she includes information on "how this musical personality, with the musical brain, its marvelous mind/body functioning, its childhood musical experiences, goes to work to make a performance," and describes what is needed in talent, training, temperament, and environment to build a successful career.

Her guidance is educated, insightful, firm, and compassionate, and will aid in removing hidden stresses and blockages that all too often keep singers and other performing musicians from achieving their full potential.

Pearl Shinn Wormhoudt is a professor emerita at William Penn University, and an Honorary Life Member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. She earned a master's degree from Columbia University, and studied voice with the noted teacher of international singers, Paola Novikova. She has studied and taught in the areas of social work, ceramics, sculpture, design, drama, and dance, and has a deep understanding of the psychology of performance and creativity.

KRISTINE MORRIS (August 5, 2009)

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