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A Philosophy of Singing

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A Touch of the Heroic

“What then, it may be asked, is the point of all the struggle for awareness? Why undertake the wearying and often fearsome journey? Why strain and strive and seek to know more, when knowing more is only to open the gates to deeper mysteries? I have often pondered this question myself, and especially in my writing, as I ask myself what possesses me to sit behind my typewriter on a beautiful summer’s day when the sky is a singing blue, and the sailboats are bright in the harbor. And you, the reader, may also be asking why you engage yourself in your own search for understanding, rather than satisfying yourself only with pleasures of the senses. I did take time out from writing to watch the landing of the Apollo 15 mission on the moon, and to hear Astronaut Dave Scott proclaim as he set foot on the lunar surface: “As I stand out here there is a fundamental truth to our nature. Man must explore. And this is exploration at its greatest.” I do not think it is fame, or fortune, or the need to sublimate a neurosis that leads people to undertake perilous journeys either outward into space or inward into the depths of the psyche. That “man must explore” is reason enough for the archetypal journey. It has been sung of old as the hero’s quest and though all who undertake it are not heroes, there is a touch of the heroic in all of us, else we could not live in this dangerous and desperate world.”

“Boundaries of the Soul – the practice of Jung’s psychology”.....June Singer

Certainly learning how to sing is a hero’s journey. Standing on the moon is one example of “exploration at its greatest.” Going into our inner space ranks just as high. It is this struggle for awareness that insists that we persevere and seek out our innermost fears and face them. In this way we can rid ourselves of our wrong perceptions. These wrong perceptions keep us bound up in our own limited view of the world. It does truly take a hero to forge ahead and break these old barriers and restrictions that have been imposed on us. Our education deals with information that keeps us within certain boundaries accepted by most. Only those who seek a different way of thinking can break out of these old boundaries.

In the world of singing we certainly must break through these barriers. The past 40 years of the art have brought us to a dead standstill as far as artists are concerned. Once in a while we hear great singing, but for the most part we are losing the thrill of a free, unique voice. What substitutes is youth and acting; sometimes a famous name long past their prime. The scenery ranks very high, as well as the stage director and the lighting man. More and more the reviews are a rehash of what the plot means to the reviewer and a history of how the work came to be. When all these things are discussed thoroughly there might be a paragraph about what we really

should have been going to the performance for in the first place—the singing. A young singer, however, can bang his/her way through the music and sound quite wonderful. The youthful energy can fool us. Not to the trained ear, however. With all our technological advances there aren't many ears left capable of hearing the difference. Now that theaters are being “acoustically enhanced”—read miked—most have become deaf to this free sound. Only after the poor singer has ploughed his voice into the ground do the critics begin to notice. Most of the other things have taken precedence. With the proper PR, the singer is often used to make as much money as possible, then they ditch them, find another, and move on. A dispensable commodity. This is what we must break away from. We must plan ahead, get in touch with our inner world, and fight the dragons who would stop us on our journey.

On the road to awareness there is another set of monsters who, rather than pushing the singer out there before he/she is really ready, block their path to becoming great. They put the fear of being too old to have a career in their minds, and so the singer rushes out there too soon and completes the cycle. Breaking away from old ways of thinking is always a fearful job. In actual fact, the fear comes from the ones who want to keep us bound to the old rules. The agents too are caught in a youth oriented trap. Instead of believing in your talent and helping you nurture it, their job has become one of fearing you're going to be too old for them to sell you. In the movie “Citizen Kane”, his opera singer wife exclaims, “I'm the one that's getting the raspberries.” Your energy must not be goaded on by their bad advice. The agent cares only as long as you're bringing in the bacon. Inside *ourselves* are the same monsters that want us to forge ahead, and we sometimes cave in to these fears, instead of waiting until we know ourselves well enough to survive. Our need to explore, our determination, must be so strong that it overrides these small-minded people who know how to control us by appealing to the negativity that keeps us enslaved. Their comments appeal to that part of us that gets fearful, and we must kill that dragon in ourselves. Then the stones being thrown at us don't touch us, for we have a purpose in life that they will never experience. On one level they know they're being left behind and behave badly. My psychic put it this way, “We often talk about the Inner Child, but very little is said about the Nasty Child. This is the one that gives us all the trouble.

For the singer, it is truly a journey into an inner world that we barely knew existed. We may have touched it when we were younger—somewhere along the way we were shamed out of it. If we continue to be shamed for what we know to be the truth, we live our lives in a dreary, mundane place known as security. The pioneers forged ahead despite not knowing what was ahead of them. We must go inside and allow our inner world to reveal itself to us. We must also become a pioneer to find our own inner power. “Man must explore.” What is best in us has been buried in too much wrong information and conforming to be a lesser person than we can be. This breaking away from the accepted way of doing things takes time and courage. Christopher Columbus certainly took a chance when he set out and defied the old information that the world was flat. There is still a group that hangs on to that old information.

It is easy to be a conformist. Being unique is a difficult task. And yet this is the task at hand. Finding out what our voice really sounds like and accepting it *allows* us to be truly unique. Most of the rules we are given to become a singer are not necessary. Use the KISS principal—Keep It Simple Stupid! It seems so many people know so many things about which they know nothing about. Why we listen to them is based on the fact that we have not conquered our own doubts

and fears. Having your plumber tell you how to tune your piano is just about as ridiculous. We must have the courage sometimes to say ‘thank you’, and leave it at that. Their little bits of information are a dangerous thing. You will not convince a person who is stuck that forging ahead into the unknown is a correct thing to do. Don’t try. Keep your own counsel—stick with the people who support you—and continue the journey. Then YOU will know when it’s time, not a pawn of somebody else.

In a new book entitled “Rich Dad, Poor Dad”, there is this little vignette that seems most appropriate to what we are talking about. It goes like this:

“Does teaching mean talking or a lecture?” rich dad asked.

“Well, yes.” I replied

“That’s how they teach you in school.” He said smiling. “But that is not how life teaches you, and I would say that life is the best teacher of all. Most of the time, life does not talk to you. It just sort of pushes you around. Each push in life is saying, “Wake up. There’s something I want you to learn.”

“What is this man talking about?” I asked myself silently. “Life pushing me around was life talking to me?” Now I knew I had to quit my job. I was talking to someone who needed to be locked up.

“If you learn life’s lessons, you will do well. If not, life will just continue to push you around. People do two things. Some just let life push them around. Others get angry and push back. But they push back against their boss, or their job, or their husband or wife. They do not know it’s life that’s pushing.”

I had no idea what he was talking about.

“Life pushes all of us around. Some give up. Others fight. A few learn the lesson and move on. They welcome life pushing them around. To these few people, it means they need and want to learn something. They learn and move on. Most quit, and a few like you fight.”

Rich Dad, Poor Dad Robert T. Kiyosaki with Sharon L. Lechter, C.P.A

So in all aspects of our life now we are seeing the same thing happening. People can no longer be stuck in their old ways of thinking and let life push them around if they are going to find their inner self. Our quest is to “learn the lesson and move on.” If we allow the happenings in life to push us around we remain stuck in our patterns. Most people criticize anyone who’s trying to find their own identity. If we get angry and push back, we are simply wasting valuable energy and blame them for our discomfort. If we listen to them we feel shamed by what they have to say and quit. What we need to do is learn what the Universe is trying to tell us. It’s waking us up! We now can learn and get unstuck. Moving ahead into the future is our goal in this lifetime. Why do singers feel uncomfortable about their singing? They’ve done a lot of work, but is it bringing them into a new realization of singing? Life is trying to push them around and wake them up.

Change is difficult, but it's the only way. We have to leave the old behind and go into the unknown.

Singing got put up on a pedestal somewhere along the way. Hundreds of books have been written on the subject, but the only teacher is experience. To have this experience some information is needed, but not the volumes of information we so often encounter. We must learn to get out of the fear of singing, and get into the joy in singing. It is not the amount of information you need, just the correct information plus perseverance. Singing is a matter of coordination. By the time the body is mature enough to study singing, our intellect has leaped light years ahead and left our poor bodies in the dust. Our breathing is shallow, the solar plexus is tight, and our mind has closed like a trap. Emotionally we can't stand the thought that our voice might crack on a note, so we start manipulating the body even more. Cracking is as close as you can come to singing correctly. It simply means something is letting go, but we immediately rush in to hold on. Only by repeating a physical pattern over and over can we eventually open ourselves up again. Most of the time our process is to unlearn old habits, not pile more on top of what we have. Our ego does not want to hear that we must learn to sing like a baby learns to walk or talk. Babies start to crawl, then begin to discover they can use their feet to stand upright. For a while the muscles do not know the coordination for walking. Little by little, after many tumbles and falls, this coordination starts to take place. With proper encouragement and someone there to help them through these precarious times, the muscles learn to coordinate and grow strong in the process. I haven't heard of any babies going to a health spa to build their muscles for walking. Neither have I seen any "How To" books written for babies to learn to walk or talk. The job is to get out of the way and allow the body to find its own coordination again. When this occurs we begin to take the responsibility of staying out of the way and move from strength to real power. If we do not take this journey we are the losers.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And being one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both the morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black,
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads onto way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh,
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost {1916}

We need to take the less traveled road in this new millennium. Choosing a path takes a great deal of courage, and it involves a commitment few are willing to make. From the singing we're hearing these days, most are on the wrong path. Even though we don't see what is lying ahead for us, the choice of moving on or staying stuck is in actual fact no choice at all. It is a necessity. No matter how much we may be criticized or even ostracized for moving on to new awakenings in our lives, the journey brings a new energy and purpose to our lives. Instead of letting our emotions rule our lives, we must let our emotions work for us. When we become identified with old information, humans find it terrifically hard to change these thoughts and leave them behind. That is the journey.

Singing is an emotional art, but we must not get caught in those emotions. Instead, when we release our energy, we become emotional and enter into this other dimension we dreamed of but never really believed we could enter. It is there for us to have. The Universe wants us to go there. All we have to do is take this path and slay the dragons as we go. Life pushes us to get on with it. We must learn to listen and learn why life is pushing us so, why we feel uneasy about ourselves or about our art. It means moving forward. There is no such thing as failure. It's only how we think about it. A failure is only a failure if we do not learn from it. If viewed as a positive thing, it can bring us to a new realization and is our wakeup call to success. Truthfully, without failure we don't move into success. Getting caught in anything emotional attached to it means we must persist on our path even more. Eventually we leave these negative emotions behind and emerge into the light of truth. We find our voice where we least expect it. This is the paradox of the true awakening. Nothing really changes; it just becomes different. We took the "road less traveled," and "that has made all the difference."