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## MUSICIANSHIP AND THE SINGER

[Since 1922, the year of its founding, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing has been actively writing and disseminating papers on all subjects pertaining to the teaching of singing. Inevitable changes in the profession itself and in musical life in general have since demanded that the Statements from the Academy be brought up to date. This Statement, changed to its present form in 1997, was originally published in 1931, then first revised in 1974.]

The Academy is keenly aware that singers with excellent voices frequently fail to make satisfactory progress in their professional careers because of inadequate musicianship. Musicianship may be defined as "the mastery of music." It calls for the ability to read music and to realize the intent of that music. The performer must possess the skills to meet the technical and interpretative demands of the composition. The singer should seek to develop these at as early an age as possible. Programs of music study that have both breadth and depth have become an accepted part of the curriculum in some secondary schools, and in colleges, universities and conservatories. Such training should be universally adopted. However, these courses should include the ability to **perform** the musical phrase as well as to recognize it on paper.

Singers have always faced a highly competitive market, and although there are many more opportunities now--more competitions and many more opera companies--there are many more singers in the field vying for these expanded opportunities. The young aspirant must not only be endowed with a beautiful voice that is well trained, as well as linguistic ability of a high order, but he or she must also be able to compete on a high musical and interpretive level. Musical theater, too, has become more musically sophisticated and requires either a fine musical background or a full-time coach.

Today, the singer who is engaged to appear with orchestras will find that, due to the tremendous expense involved, he is allowed a relatively short rehearsal time. A good musician will not waste the valuable time of a conductor and orchestra; a poor one will be too expensive, therefore unacceptable. In opera, at the first rehearsal (usually musical without staging) a singer must know his part from memory and must sing it with musical understanding. Perhaps the singer can achieve this by working the role with a good coach, but the expense involved in coaching a role from the beginning of the learning process can cost hundreds, even several thousand dollars. This is prohibitive for most singers, and, one would think, humiliating for anyone calling himself a musician. A coach should be used, of course, but only after a role is memorized. Musicianship is essential, and it helps to be a quick study.

Television and radio commercials afford an exceedingly lucrative field for a limited number of singers. The ability to read music speedily and accurately is a prime requisite for this specialized area of the profession.

One cannot be expected to reach perfection before attempting professional activity, but the fact remains that a regrettable number of promising singers have met failure and disappointment by plunging ahead without adequate musical and technical preparation. A singing career should not be launched without this preparation. Teachers and managers have the responsibility to counsel patience and diligence.

In earlier times it was said that the three essential ingredients for a singer were "voice, voice, and more voice." Today, in addition to voice, good musicianship is imperative.