

Richard Dale Sjoerdsma

# WVD and MO



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## WVD

**C**ONTINUING A TRADITION BEGUN TWELVE YEARS ago, the cover of this issue of the *Journal of Singing* carries the theme for World Voice Day 2020. The event traces its roots to a 1999 decision by a group of Brazilian voice professionals to celebrate the voice as an annual Brazilian Voice Day. The idea quickly found resonance in other countries around the world, and, in 2002, the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery recognized the occasion, marking it as World Voice Day to occur annually on April 16.

The concept took a few years to permeate my consciousness, but since 2008 I have published the World Voice Day theme on the cover of each March/April issue of the journal and dedicated an edition of “Editor’s Commentary” to the occasion.

- 2008 Let Your Voice Be Heard
- 2009 Invest In Your Voice
- 2010 Love Your Voice
- 2011 We Share A Voice
- 2012 Your Voice Counts
- 2013 Connect With Your Voice
- 2014 Educate Your Voice
- 2015 Voice: The Original Social Media
- 2016 Explore Your Voice
- 2017 Share Your Voice
- 2018 Make The Choice to Cherish Your Voice
- 2019 Be Kind With Your Voice
- 2020 Focus On Your Voice In 2020

“Focus On Your Voice In 2020.” When Dr. VyVy Young, chair of the WVD planning committee, informed me of the 2020 theme choice, I admit to an initial sense of disappointment, deeming it rather banal when compared to what I considered more provocative previous statements. After all, voice practitioners *expect* to focus on the voice in 2020—as always. What more could one say beyond a resounding “Amen”?

Upon reflection, though, it occurred to me that the theme may be construed as “Focus On Your Voice in 20/20.” But 20/20 what? Vision? Hindsight? Foresight? All of the above? Perhaps, if my conclusion about the theme’s optical allusion is correct, we are encouraged to contemplate all of its implications. (Note: Shortly after drafting this column, Dr. Young confirmed that the *double entendre* was in fact the intent of the WVD Committee.)

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First, however, let us direct attention to the imperative, “focus.” The word typically means to bring into clear visual definition. Cameras, binoculars, scopes, and similar devices often are used to illustrate the definition of the term. Regular visits to my optometrist involves peering through the phoropter as the doctor alternates lenses and seeks my determination as to which is the sharper image. So focus involves judgment and decision. I would argue, too, that focus has mental and corporal implications. For example, a dancer’s mind and entire body are focused on choreographic expression. In all cases, focus implies intention, concentration, and attention.

### Vision

What may be implied in 20/20 vision? One of the first considerations to come to mind is the difficulty of “seeing” (hearing) one’s voice for what it is, and, concomitantly, the need for and trust in others. As an example I may cite my personal journey from baritone to tenor. Although I was perfectly content and developing a career as a baritone, I was accumulating a catalog of criticism—professional and nonprofessional—that documented my low notes as manufactured and praised the “high ride” of the voice. Eventually, I had to listen.

O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
(Robert Burns, “To a Louse”)

A present 20/20 vision also recognizes one’s vocal and physiologic strengths and vulnerabilities. It is aware that the voice is not only the product but also the barometer of the body and mind, and that the care and nurture of both are essential. Beautiful singing is the result of correct habits in the training of the voice, whole body, and mind. This periodical is dedicated to addressing these and related matters, and provocative discussions on them appear regularly on these pages.

### Hindsight

20/20 hindsight examines where one has been, what one has learned, what has been successful, and what may have gone awry. Sometimes, retrospection can be painful. During vocally formative years, I was the unwitting recipient of bad, harmful pedagogy, which became quite clear in hindsight. (I intend to elaborate upon that in a future edition of “Editor’s Commentary.”) As one

example among several, to this day I need to remind myself to give body to the [ i ] vowel.

One must make an accurate assessment of vocal growth—what worked, what didn’t, and why; have a knowledge and command of repertoire—what worked, what didn’t, and why; be conscious of vocal hygiene—where slippery slopes occurred; and a host of other factors. Discernment and honesty are key.

### Foresight

In terms of 20/20 foresight, here is where I find trouble. Acceptance seems to play a principal role here, as one encounters aging, along with corresponding physical changes and limitations. On her 80th birthday, my mother shared with me her continuing surprise at her white-haired image reflected in the mirror; she didn’t at all feel her chronological age. Similarly, I internally hear my voice as a 40 year old, and am surprised at the vagaries age has wrought upon the instrument and that which houses it. In addition to acceptance, 20/20 foresight requires trust in a sound technique and greater attention to voice care.

One’s current 20/20 vision, of course, is affected by hindsight and affects foresight. Metaphorically as well as in reality, all vision requires lenses. A 20/20 focus on the voice is conducted through lenses intellectual, musical, lingual, pedagogic, scientific, medical. Of course, there may occur occasional blurring, and perhaps a few floaters along the way, but a disciplined cleansing of lens will return a 20/20 focus.

### MO

It was 2001, I was only half way through my first publication cycle as editor, struggling to establish an identity as editor in chief of a scholarly journal and to master the intricacies of that position, while simultaneously coping with what in effect was a change of direction in career. Then, to my considerable dismay, the unexpected occurred: Singular Thompson Learning announced that they would discontinue producing the *Journal of Singing*, and I unceremoniously was forced to look elsewhere for those services. A neophyte to the business of editing, I knew even less about publishers and printing companies.

It was determined that the Association itself would become the publisher of the journal, but we still needed



Editor Sjoerdsma with Modern Litho sales representative Ed Zagorac.

a printer. Dr. William Vessels, then Executive Director of NATS, sent to me a bundle of brochures from various printing companies, and, as it happened, I serendipitously selected from among them an attractive one from Modern Litho-Print Co., Jefferson City, MO. A telephone contact resulted in an invitation to interview them, and, on February 17, 2002, I flew to St. Louis, where I was met by Ed Zagorac, who remains our sales representative from Modern Litho. Our trip to Jefferson City was an adventure in itself, as the company car had a flat tire on Interstate 70, just outside St. Louis. With vehicles roaring by, Ed changed the tire only to discover that the small spare showed a bulge that ensured it could not sustain a trip to Jefferson City. It was Sunday evening, and several futile attempts to find a service facility finally culminated in locating a shop where a young man was about to close for the night. After considerable pleading, he reluctantly agreed to sell and mount a new tire.

My interview with Modern Litho the next day was most impressive. Ed was extremely knowledgeable about the printing business and process, and he led an extensive and informative tour of the plant. At the end of the tour, without my foreknowledge, Ed had invited graphics artist Laura Carter, founder and manager of Carter Publishing Studio in Fulton, MO, with whom Modern Litho had worked in the past and whom they



Editor Sjoerdsma with *Journal of Singing* graphics artist, Laura Carter.

highly recommended. And the rest, as they say, is history. Our first collaborative product was *Journal of Singing* 59, no. 1 (September/October 2002).

Ed and his late wife Jean, and Laura, along with husband Jim and daughter Emma, have become friends over the years, and Mary and I have been back on several occasions. (Fulton, by the way, is known as the site of Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College, March 5, 1946. The campus also houses the fascinating National Churchill Museum.) Our last visit was in November 2019. We again were received most cordially at Modern Litho, as documented in a welcome graphic on a screen in the plant's reception area (see photo). I was astonished at the advances in technology since our last visit, about which Ed was as informed and articulate as ever. We also spent quality time with Laura and Jim.

In 20/20 hindsight, that trip to Missouri 18 years ago was of monumental significance to NATS, the journal, and me. I would think that few editors of professional journals have the luxury of highly competent business associates who are also good friends. I am humbly grateful.

Plan something special on April 16 to celebrate the voice. Focus on your voice with 20/20 in 2020 . . . and always.