

## Care of the Professional Voice: A Guide to Voice Management for Singers, Actors and Professional Voice Users

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Care of the Professional Voice: A Guide to Voice Management for Singers, Actors and Professional Voice Users**, by D. Garfield Davies and Anthony F. Jahn, Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2004, 176 pp., U.S. \$29.50 (paperback), ISBN 9780713667950

*Care of the Professional Voice: A Guide to Voice Management for Singers, Actors and Professional Voice Users*, by D. Garfield Davies and Anthony F. Jahn, is a detailed and accessible medical reference book that empowers professional voice users to be stronger self-advocates for their vocal health. Despite the age of this publication (first published in 1998 and released again in 2005), this book remains a valuable resource for singers, actors, and voice and speech professionals who are seeking information on vocal health, maintenance, and longevity.

The authors provide concise and detailed information covering a wide range of topics. The first two chapters, “Anatomy and Physiology of the Vocal Mechanism” and “Development of the Larynx and the Voice,” provide foundational information regarding vocal structure and function. Subsequent chapters address common medical and performance issues singers and actors may encounter throughout their performance careers. While all of the chapters are connected, they also function independently and do not need to be read sequentially.

The medical resource chapters discuss many common vocal disorders such as: laryngitis, vocal nodules, and laryngeal polyps, and they include information regarding diagnosis and potential treatment. The authors also provide valuable insight about surgical procedures and interactions with medical providers that empowers the artist to be an “informed and knowledgeable patient [who] feels that he [or she] is part of the treatment team, rather than a passive victim of unknown and unforeseeable events” (116). Other chapters include advice on using various medications and how they may impact the voice.

The chapters on performance topics also tackle a range of issues that are relevant to the professional voice user including: pre-performance considerations, performance anxiety as it relates to the voice, travel related voice issues, and technique evaluations for both popular and musical theatre repertoires. These chapters are similarly concise, detailed, and empowering.

The final chapter is by Anat Keidar, PhD, CCC-SLP. This chapter is new for the 2004 edition of the book and was included “at the request of singers and their teachers” (xi). This concluding chapter summarizes many of the major themes discussed throughout the book and is set apart from others through two distinctions: (1) It is the only chapter that includes an exercise the voice user may utilize for personal assessment. (2) This chapter briefly hints at what constitutes “good singing.” I agree with Keidar that the topic will remain controversial. But given the ongoing debate surrounding classical and contemporary commercial music (CCM) singing styles, this discussion was welcome, and I would have enjoyed an even larger dialogue about similar contemporary debates.

Some of the most useful elements of the book are in the anatomy inserts (referred to as plates), the glossary of terms, and the bibliography of suggested additional readings. The glossary of terms specifically helps define terminology commonly used in vocal music and medical settings. The inserted anatomical plates provide detailed images of the thoracic and laryngeal structures, along with images of vocal folds with various medical diagnoses that

correspond to previously described medical conditions. The reading list at the end of the book includes multiple clinical and singing references.

While the authors acknowledge the differing vocal demands for actors and singers, I believe there is an unintentional bias within the text toward the classical singer. For example, the authors repeatedly use of the term “singer” to refer to the professional voice user, while they seldom use the word “actor.” The text could also benefit from a more balanced representation of the professional actor’s vocal demands, specifically regarding training techniques and work in musical theatre. Actor terminology could also be included in the glossary (i.e. breath, speech, resonance, support), and the bibliography would similarly benefit with more references to actor training and speech training for the actor.

A more detailed account of technique would be helpful at times. For example, in the popular/musical theatre styles chapter, the authors acknowledge:

The quality of singing voice sought in musicals and popular venues is radically different from that expected on the operatic stage [...] If operatic singers are the high jumpers of the vocal Olympics, Broadway or West End performers are its marathon runners [...] The Broadway/West End popular and rock musical milieu is a world of high wear and tear. (61)

While these distinctions are accurate, a more detailed comparison, beyond simple advice and metaphors, could have been explored. Nevertheless, authors negotiate numerous intricate topics within a compact text (less than 200 pages), so the depth to which certain subjects can be explored is understandably limited.

Given the continued interest among professional voice and speech communities to collaborate, this book successfully works “to bring together both vocalist and physician on common ground” (ix). While other voice texts primarily consist of practice-based exercises, this book uniquely provides a depth of medical knowledge that is accessible to voice professionals within a compact text. Ultimately, the authors provide an excellent tool for integrating the work of artists, educators, and clinicians from across the voice disciplines, and this book would be a valuable resource for any professional voice user.

## Notes on contributor



Colton Weiss is a research assistant at The Ohio State University (OSU), and is a graduate of the American Repertory Theater (ART) Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University where he studied voice and speech pedagogy under, Erika Bailey. His coaching credits include: *The Owl Answers* (Harvard University/David R. Gammons, dir.), *Charlotte’s Web* (ART/Dmitry Troyanovsky, dir.), *Violet the Musical* (ART Oberon/Sammi Cannold, dir.), *Kin* (Tufts University/Barbara Grossman, dir.). His research interests include dialect coaching for musical theatre, and he teaches courses covering dialects and voice and speech skills for performers. He earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in speech and hearing science and theatre/music studies from OSU (coltonweiss.com).

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