

HOW TO GET OFF THE SOFA AND SING LIKE A PROFESSIONAL (OPERA) SINGER

A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide to Developing the Tone and Techniques
required of a Singer who sings in the Classical or Romantic Style

Writer | Author | Broadcaster | Singer

ROBERT LITTLE

“Never sing louder than lovely.”

Isobel Baillie (1895 – 1983), one of the 20th century’s
greatest exponents of oratorio singing.

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- Carl French, of The Endless Bookcase, for his support and encouragement with this project.
- Edgar Evans, a former principal tenor at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, who shared the secrets of vocal technique with me over many years – which has enabled me to enjoy singing in concerts, oratorios, light, comic and grand operas.

Robert Little



Robert Little, in the role of the sailor, Richard Dauntless, in Gilbert & Sullivan's opera, Ruddigore (performed by the Putteridge Bury Gilbert & Sullivan Society in May 2011).

REVIEW COMMENTS

“The author’s infectious enthusiasm and humorous approach to his subject permeates the whole text of this new e-book...

This book will surely be a source of encouragement and a useful guide for the aspiring singer.”

John Falk

Retired. Formerly, Assistant Director of Studies and Head of Student Services at Trinity College of Music in London

“Bob Little’s useful book takes a singer interested in perfecting their technique by the hand and shows them in easy steps what can be achieved. Understanding that singing in public is also about confidence, through amusing anecdotes and inspiring quotations, Little shows that he has learned from the best and applied what he himself has learned to his love of being on the stage.

This book is both practical and wonderfully inspirational.

When I next want to ensure I keep in tune I, too, will lift my eyebrows!”

Professor Frank Banks
The Open University

PREFACE

It's now a long time ago since I decided I wanted to learn how to sing. It took me about ten years to pluck up the courage and find the opportunity to begin to learn to sing – and it's a skill, an art and a technique which, many years later, I'm still trying to perfect.

This booklet tells a little of my sojourn in singing but it sets out a lot more of the singing technique that I've learnt along the way. That technique, along with some excellent vocal coaching, has been culled from professional opera singers who, in turn, learnt their technique from the rather stern teacher of experience and, in one case, the even sterner (but ultimately hugely rewarding) experience of working with a world class singing teacher in Rome.

I hope this booklet will give you some useful tips and techniques in your search for the secrets of successful singing – and that you'll have at least as much fun from this extremely demanding but rewarding performing art as I've had over the years.

Robert Little

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THE MAESTRO – AND HIS TEACHER

‘Opportunity is missed by most people because it is
dressed in overalls and looks like work.’

Thomas A. Edison (1847 – 1931),
scientist, inventor and businessman.

This “how to...” booklet is the result of techniques and tips given to me by Edgar Evans who, as a principal tenor at the Royal Opera just after the Second World War, was sent to study singing – in 1950 - with the great singing teacher Luigi Ricci, in Rome.

Although by then Edgar was a seasoned and successful opera singer, he always said that those six weeks of intensive training by Ricci – who had trained a number of world class singers including the baritone, Tito Gobbi – gave him the vocal technique to enable him to sing major roles on an almost daily basis at Covent Garden.

Edgar Evans is best remembered for creating the role of Hermann in Tchaikovsky’s “The Queen of Spades” at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.



Figure 1. Edgar Evans as Hermann, in Tchaikovsky's opera, The Queen of Spades, at Covent Garden.

In all, Edgar sang some 45 roles – most of them major ones - at Covent Garden from 1946 when, as one of its three principal tenors, he became a founder member of the Covent Garden Opera Company. He remained as a principal tenor with what became the Royal Opera until his retirement in 1975.

In that time, he sang more roles and more performances at the Opera House than any other artist.

1.1 Roles

Those roles included Steva in the first British stage performance of “Jenufa”, Zinovy in the British premiere of “Katerina Ismailova”, the Interpreter and A Celestial Messenger in the premiere of Vaughan Williams’ “Pilgrim’s Progress”, Andres in the first Covent Garden “Wozzeck” and Captain Davidson in Richard Rodney Bennett’s “Victory”. In addition, he was Dmitri in the company’s first “Boris Godunov”, Hermann in the first Covent Garden “Queen of Spades” under Kleiber, Riccardo (Gustavus) in the first “Masked Ball” performed at Covent Garden since the War, Aegisthus in the first post-War “Elektra”, Hellenus in “The Trojans” conducted by Kubelik, Narraboth in the Brook-Dali “Salome”, and Froh in the first post-War Covent Garden Ring.

Born in Cardiganshire in 1912, the son of Margaret and William Evans, a farmer, and the youngest - by eight years - of 13 children, Edgar heard the voice of Enrico Caruso over the radio at the age of eight.

From then on his only and all-embracing ambition was to be a singer, despite his father’s ambitions for him to become a banker or an architect.

1.2 Opportunity

The opportunity to take up singing professionally came when this, by now, articled pupil to the County Architect was heard singing “Loch Lomond” in a pub, called The Irish House, in Piccadilly, while on a rugby trip to London in 1934.

The “talent scout” took him by taxi to The Odd Spot nightclub in London’s West End, from where he was referred to Arthur Fagg,

conductor of The London Choral Society, who knew Dawson Freer, a singing teacher at the Royal College of Music.

One week later, Edgar became a pupil of Freer's - who began by telling him that he sang too loudly!

These early lessons helped Edgar to establish himself as a professional singer, but he felt that his voice and vocal technique improved immeasurably when, later in his career, the Royal Opera arranged for him to continue his studies – this time (in 1950) with the Italian maestro, Luigi Ricci, in Rome.

Some 18 months after meeting Freer, Edgar auditioned for Lillian Bayliss and became a chorister with the Sadler's Wells Opera Company in 1937.

Throughout the War, he was singing in shows for CEMA and ENSA, entertaining the troops, under the direction of Walter Legge and performing with artists including Maggie Teyte, Joyce Grenfell, Richard Addinsell (composer of the Warsaw Concerto) and many others. In all, he sang in over 500 concerts during the war.

1.3 Covent Garden audition

A chance meeting with Henry Robinson, formerly stage manager at Sadler's Wells, resulted in Edgar applying for an audition with the newly formed Covent Garden Opera Company. Singing "E lucevan le stelle" from "Tosca" and the Flower Song from "Carmen", Edgar was chosen from scores of tenor hopefuls from around the world and progressed successfully through three auditions to receive the offer of a contract from the Administrator, David Webster, in the middle of August 1946.

His first roles were as the bird god and lover in Purcell's "Faerie