

Primo Tenori: Serendipity and Pseudo-Serendipity in Early Career Paths

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Abstract

International opera singers aim for the highest levels of career success possible. How did chance events impact their careers? To date, careers in opera have remained overlooked in the empirical career and counseling literature. The present article sheds light on careers of great tenors in opera history who were ready to take advantage of chance phenomena that facilitated advancement at initial stages of career development. The career counseling theory of planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999) is underscored as an appropriate vista for exploring chance events. Historic data suggest careers in opera merit researchers' belated attention and the inclusion of the chance variable as a facilitator of success. Implications for research are noted.

Keywords: Performing artists, opera singers, career management, chance, planned happenstance.

Introduction

Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, and José Carreras, the world famous "Three Tenors," premièred an outdoor benefit concert in Rome, on the occasion of the 1990 Soccer World Cup, telecasted to a global audience. For some individuals, this creative marketing idea provided an unforeseen, first time cultural exposure to renown arias and popular songs interpreted by extraordinary contemporary opera singers. This magnum performance was followed by a series of world concerts—Monte Carlo and Los Angeles, CA, in 1994; Tokyo, London, Vienna, New York, Sweden, Germany, and Vancouver, Canada, in 1996; Toronto, Canada, and Australia, Miami, Italy and Spain, in 1997; Paris, in 1998; Japan,

South Africa, and two concerts in the US, in 1999; Brazil and four concerts in different cities of the US, in 2000; China and South Korea, in 2001; and Japan and the US in 2002 (see three-tenors.com). Due to their world exposure, and availability of recordings and films, Pavarotti, Domingo, and Carreras today are household names for many people.

Did chance play a role for gaining prominence at an early career stage, and if so, how? In 1963, for a performance of *La Bohème* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, the relatively unknown Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti was requested to sing at some rehearsals before the arrival of the famous Italian tenor Giuseppe Di Stefano who had the lead role of Rodolfo. Di Stefano, however, cancelled due to vocal problems and young Pavarotti, accidentally, successfully substituted—both for the opera and for the television program, "Sunday Night at the Palladium," viewed by a British audience of 15 million. *Decca* offered the newcomer his first recording contract with which he began an important aspect of his career. Also, conductor Richard Bonyngé requested he sing with his wife, soprano Joan Sutherland, which led to many successful joint performances in Australia as well as recordings (Pavarotti, n.d.). Pavarotti was at the right place, at the right time. The additional events were serendipitous spin-offs of his successful performance, which marked the beginning of his international exposure. Pavarotti had made his successful stage début just two years earlier, in 1961, in the same role (*La Bohème*), at the Teatro Municipale of Reggio Emilia. His Metropolitan Opera, New York, début was performed in 1968, again as Rodolfo, and by early 1970, he was a leading world tenor (Thompson, 1976). This type of historic, verifiable chance

event in the performing arts, witnessed by audiences, has favored many singers worldwide in all voice categories, providing a career leap, if successful; in such cases, the role of mass media cannot be overlooked or underestimated as a contributing socio-cultural variable.

The Metropolitan Opera, New York, is the major opera stage in North America and one of the major four opera houses of the world, together with La Scala, Milan, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, London, and the Wiener Staatsoper. Opera history shows that generations of singers have aspired to triumph on this prestigious stage, a grand dream also shared by contemporary international newcomers and voice students.

Currently, opera circles are aware that Italian spinto tenor Salvatore Licitra made his début at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, on 11 May 2002, also accidentally. Pavarotti, the now aging superstar on the verge of retiring from the opera stage, announced at the last hour that he could not sing at the final night Gala Performance, for which some had paid up to \$1,875 per non-refundable ticket. To possibly replace him as Mario Cavaradossi in Puccini's *Tosca*, Licitra was flown in from Italy with little advance notice. Licitra's stellar début at the Metropolitan Opera, with a sold-out house of 4,000 and the additional 3,000 fans who witnessed the video cast at Lincoln Center plaza, made a global media-splash. Overnight, opera lovers wanted to hear the newly discovered tenor who had already made his La Scala début in 1998, in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*. Recording sales soon soared as an exclusive artist of Sony Classical (Anthonisen, 2002a; also see Blum, 2002; Sony Classical, 2002; Williams, 2002).

Paradoxically, there is a void in empirical studies on the role of chance

in careers of prominent opera singers in the vocational, career and counseling literature. Bandura's (1982, 1998) repeated call for psychological research on fortuitous events in human endeavors has been heard by too few. Empirical studies on chance or serendipity in careers are counted (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996; Cabral & Salomone, 1990; Hart, Rayner, & Christensen, 1971; Miller, 1983; Scott & Hatala, 1990; Williams et al., 1998; for a review, see Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). Of this literature, only one addresses highly achieving people.

Williams, Soeprapto, Like, Touradji, Hess, and Hill (1998) conducted a seminal qualitative study that took into account serendipity perceptions of prominent adult professional women in the US, focusing on the context of chance events and their readiness to use chance opportunities in career decisions. Results indicated that all 13 prominent academic women in counseling psychology who participated in the study had profited from serendipity at different career stages—serendipity defined as events unplanned by the participants. While the requirements for a career in counseling psychology evidently are quite different than for a career in opera, the personal “readiness” variable is applicable to all careers of both genders. Internal readiness factors include self-confidence and optimism, flexibility, risk-taking attitudes and skills, high motivation and willingness to work hard, and persistence, among others. External readiness factors include external support systems as well as social and cultural factors (Williams et al, 1998; see Díaz de Chumaceiro, 1999a). For Krumboltz (1998), “Serendipity is ubiquitous” (¶ 6). He considers this study “a valuable wakeup-call that our theories of career development need revision and that unplanned events need to assume a major role in our thinking about the best ways to help people with their career concerns” (¶ 11).

Regarding readiness, rarer cases of chance substitutions can occur during an opera performance, between acts, due to a singer's sudden loss of voice or the emergence of other illnesses. For instance, American tenor Frederick

Jagel, a member of the Metropolitan Opera since his 1927 *début* as Radamès (*Aida*), creatively rescued an emergency situation a few years later. A day of glory unexpectedly surfaced when a Saturday matinee of Verdi's *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera was being broadcasted in 1938, and the leading dramatic Italian tenor Giovanni Martinelli suddenly became indisposed (food poisoning) while singing the aria, “Celeste Aida.” Jagel, who happened to be listening to the broadcast at home, immediately hailed a taxi to run to the Metropolitan. In less than twenty minutes later, he replaced Martinelli on stage as Radamès (Davis, 1997). The serendipitous rescuing was possible for Jagel due to his listening to the broadcast, and living near enough to get to the Met on time for the next act. All human beings can become indisposed at one time or another, yet psychological factors are known to affect the voice and singers cancel for different reasons (see Sandgren, 2002).

Relevance of the Field

In North America, there are innumerable talented students currently training for a career in opera, in universities or privately. The number of major and minor opera houses of the world is limited as is the number of performances per season. As the pool of international performing artists aspiring to be contracted is greater than the openings available, it is a very competitive job market at the top, and prominent singers are engaged several years in advance. In the absence of empirical data, vocational and career counselors are intuitively groping in the dark, unless they happen to have a background in this field. Thus, a verifiable source of illumination for career counselors and young singers struggling to enter the field as well as for the design and planning of needed research studies are chance events in opera history. Although chance in this field is a variable that can make a difference, aspiring singers cannot just hope that someone is going to default and provide them with an opening, and magically, they are going to be there at the right place and at the right time, due to the right contacts. A GPS-like road map is needed as many other chance options

can emerge in different contexts.

The advent of planned happenstance theory (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) is timely, providing a novel context for exploring chance phenomena in all fields, including the variables of career success and job satisfaction (e.g., Neault, 2002). This practical and easy-to-apply theory is viewed as having amended career counseling's learning theory (Krumboltz, 1996), which already had expanded social learning theory of career decisions (Krumboltz, 1979). In short, the conceptual framework of planned happenstance has extended career counseling to include the recognition, creation, and transformation of unplanned events into learning opportunities. Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz urge clients to develop five basic skills for these objectives: Curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking.

Memorable opera singers demonstrate having these skills as well as others; undoubtedly, without these basic personal tools and an exceptional vocal instrument they never would have achieved such high levels of recognition. Overlooked career histories of world-class opera singers contain varied examples of chance events showing how these creative performing artists intuitively, and by trial-and-error, took advantage of unexpected options, or helped create them with positive action to advance their goals, particularly at early career stages when it is most difficult to gain recognition in this highly competitive field. Performing artists dream of having such lucky breaks, and teachers remind them that they are necessary. Different types of chance events have favored many prepared, talented performing artists at different stages of career development confirming Pasteur's famous remark, “Chance only favors prepared minds” (Díaz de Chumaceiro, 2003, in press). Ambitious individuals in many careers share such wishes for luck, prospectively and retrospectively.

Serendipity (Walpole, 1754) is currently defined as the accidental discovery of the unsought for, and is often applied in the medical and scientific literature (Díaz de Chumaceiro, 1999b). In the performing arts, however, it is the artist who is discovered by audi-

ences and critics, acclaimed as a new star in the media. *Pseudo-serendipity*, coined by Roberts (1989) to differentiate this phenomenon from true serendipity, is the accidental finding of the sought for. On observing the rare use of this term in the literature, the term “serendipity analogues” was suggested as an alternative for those who object to the “pseudo” pre-fix to characterize their important discoveries (Díaz de Chumaceiro & Yáber, 1995). Later, however, it came to light that Walpole in 1754 had observed discoveries that were sought for and accidentally found, which were “almost” like serendipity, but not exactly, and this variant had been termed *sortes Walpolianae* by his friend Horace Mann (Díaz de Chumaceiro, 1999c). Due to its lack of diffusion, the phenomenon of pseudo-serendipity often remains confounded with true serendipity. The meaning of the term “planned happenstance” is identical to “planned serendipity” (see Mirvis, 1998; Snyder, 1990). By definition, both terms denote pseudo-serendipitous events—not serendipitous ones.

Role Models

Most fields have legendary role models. Enrico Caruso is recognized as the greatest of late 19th—early 20th century tenors, and remains a role model for many. Highlights of a few chance events in his career are a case in point. Born in Naples in 1873, Caruso was the third of seven siblings of a poor but not destitute family; his first musical instruction was received at the church where he sang in the choir until his voice changed, and then he made a living as a serenader for hire. By chance, Caruso, influenced by a minor singer, decided to seek formal voice lessons. His career path started to materialize with the help of several teachers and agents (White, 1990). For instance, recruited into the army for three years, his voice rescued him. When his reputation spread throughout the camp, the impressed major introduced him to a local nobleman, an opera lover who taught singing. Through his efforts, Caruso had found a new teacher and was discharged from the army.

Guglielmo Vergine was the main teacher who prepared Caruso to sing in

L'Amico Francesco (Morelli) for his début at the Teatro Nuovo, Naples, on 16 November 1894. Not always successful, nevertheless, he continuously sang and studied with conductor Vincenzo Lombardi (Celletti, 1980/1995). His career path changed in the summer of 1897. When composer Giacomo Puccini heard Caruso for the first time in his audition for the staging of *La Bohème* in Livorno, astounded, he asked the now celebrated question: “Who sent you to me? God himself?” (Vernon, 1994, p. 2). A break for Caruso, no doubt. A second one unexpectedly occurred when for the première of *Fedora* in Milan, in 1898, Caruso received a call for a serendipitous substitution in the creation of the tenor role. In composer Giordano’s view, “Fedora had been consecrated with the new star. . . Caruso’s voice conquered everyone’s hearts” (Vernon, 1994, p. 2). Caruso also had the distinction of creating the tenor roles for Cilèa’s operas *L’Arlesiana* (in Teatro Lirico, Milan, 1897) and *Adriana Lecouvreur* (in Teatro Lirico, Milan, 1902); and for Franchetti’s *Germania* in 1902. The creation of new opera roles is a less frequently occurring serendipitous event. Also in 1902, Caruso’s fame became international with his great success at Monte Carlo in *La Bohème*, with Australian soprano Nellie Melba; he also performed that year at Covent Garden, London, with Melba and French baritone Maurice Renaud in *Rigoletto* (Thompson, 1975). Notably, however, in 1901, when Caruso received a controversial reaction to his performance of *L’Elisir d’Amore* at Teatro San Carlos, Naples, after having triumphed with it at La Scala, Milan, he firmly decided to never perform again in his home town, and so it was (Celletti, 1980/1995).

On 11 April 1902, a transcendental serendipitous event occurred for Caruso when unexpectedly, a lucrative recording contract for 10 arias (at £10 each) was presented to him by the Gramophone and Typewriter Company, an affiliate of the Victor Talking Machine Company. Fred Gaisberg, recording engineer, heard Caruso perform in Milan and then creatively attempted to convince the company and Caruso to agree to the recordings.

Although Gaisberg’s boss in London considered the fee too high, against their specific instructions he closed the deal (Vernon, 1994). Until then, no significant entertainer had agreed to such a risky venture. The outcome? The first exclusive contract with a celebrity had been created by The Victor Talking Machine Company. The public purchased both the records and machines to play them (*Johnson Victrola Museum*, 2002). Thus, by the time Caruso made his début in New York, he was equally known in America as in Europe. Caruso was the first tenor to record for posterity (Thompson, 1975). He dared to take a risk which paid off handsomely in making him famous and rich. At the time of his early death, recording royalties surpassed two million dollars. The Gramophone Company gained £15,000 from that first deal (Vernon, 1994).

On 3 November 1903, Caruso made his Metropolitan Opera début as the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, and on this famous stage he eventually sang a total of 37 roles in 607 performances, in 18 seasons, of which he performed on opening night for 17 operas. At 48, at the pinnacle of his career, he died in Naples, on 2 August 1921, as a result of bronchial pneumonia which had developed into pleurisy (Thompson, 1975). His exceptionally beautiful voice set a standard in his times. A complementary aspect of Caruso’s career was that he also loved popular songs, having begun as a serenade singer. During his career, he presented concerts of Neapolitan songs and recorded many of his favorites.

After Caruso’s death, on opening night at the Metropolitan Opera in November 1921, the honor of singing Alfredo in *La Traviata* was bestowed on Beniamino Gigli, the great Italian tenor known as “The People’s Singer,” due to his multiple popular performances beyond opera. His lucky break had come in 1914, with the international vocal contest in Parma; pseudo-serendipitously, he resulted first among 32 tenors, of 105 singers in total of all categories. The famous tenor Alessandro Bonci happened to be in the jury, and with Caruso performing practically exclusively in the United States for the Metropolitan Opera, leaving a

void in Italy, he wrote in his jury report: “*Abbiamo finalmente trovato il tenore*”—“At last we have found the tenor” (Anthonisen, 2002b). Gigli had made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 1920, in the role of Faust (Boito’s *Mefistofele*).

Caruso and Gigli’s singing of both opera and popular music, called today cross-over artists, have been topped in modern times by The Three Tenors, selected for the introduction. Notably, in September 1968, Domingo advanced his Metropolitan Opera debut (by four days), substituting for the famed Italian tenor Franco Corelli, who cancelled due to hoarseness with less than an hour for the start of *Adriana Lecouvreur*. In 1999, Domingo, who had already interpreted 119 roles, was the first tenor ever to outdo Caruso’s opening night record at the Metropolitan Opera (Tommasini, 1999). Undoubtedly, Pavarotti, Domingo (also a leading conductor), and Carreras, are contemporary role models for their many achievements as well as for promotion of younger singers entering the field (e.g., the *Pavarotti International Voice Competition*, Domingo’s *Operalia*), and for Carreras’ International Leukemia Foundation.

Remarkably, Carreras, born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1946, experienced a more unusual type of serendipitous event that launched his career. By his 18th birthday, his lyric tenor voice was evident, and he initially studied with Jaime Francisco Puig. Later, Juan Ruax became his teacher, considered by Carreras “his artistic father” (Peccei, 1999). Ruax encouraged Carreras’ audition for what became at Barcelona’s opera house, Gran Teatro del Liceo, his first tenor role in *Norma*, as Flavio. “This minor role had major consequences for his career” (§ 5). The beautifully sung few phrases of Flavio caught the attention of both critics and his compatriot prominent soprano Montserrat Caballé who sang the title role in 1970 with him. Consequently, she requested he sing with her the role of Genaro in *Lucrezia Borgia* (Donizetti)—his first major role, which he views as “his ‘real’ debut as a tenor” (§ 5). In more ways than one, Caballé became “his artistic mother” (§ 6). For his London stage debut in 1971, she

interpreted the title role in the concert performance of *Maria Stuarda* (Donizetti). Their artistic partnership led to recordings of over 15 operas (Peccei, 1999). Another compatriot who supported him early was Rafael Frübeck de Brugos; in 1970, he engaged him for Verdi’s *Requiem* in Madrid (Bernheimer, 1980/1995a). By age 28, when many in the field are just commencing to gain recognition, Carreras already had interpreted in Europe and North America lead tenor roles in 24 operas, having made his debut at the great four opera houses of the world. Singers can never know in advance the outcome of singing well a minor role.

The voice teacher’s role of encouragement for tackling a direct goal was a crucial first step which resulted in Carreras’ pseudo-serendipitous winning of the audition—an example of planned happenstance. Instead, his successful pairing with Caballé was true serendipity, as he had no say in her being the lead role for Bellini’s *Norma*, or that his voice would blend well with hers. The recordings that followed were unforeseen serendipity spin-offs from the previous event. At the start of a career, to unexpectedly be requested to sing with an established, highly recognized artist is indeed a serendipitous lucky break, as also noted that occurred to Pavarotti with Sutherland. For an expanded understanding of great opera voices, they must be heard; contemporary artists have customized websites, record-company sites, and fan sites, increasingly with audio excerpts (Leff, 2000); sometimes, voices of the past can also be found in cyberspace.

An opera career can be viewed in three broad stages: (a) an initial stage, as a vocal student, entering the field, and obtaining traditional debuts in the major opera houses; (b) a middle stage of career management, which is the longest period, includes establishment of a solid, highly achieving career, with all its vicissitudes (e.g., vocal and health problems, performance anxiety; family life events, and so on.); and (c) a final stage after retirement from the opera stage, which often includes “a second career” in concerts and recitals, master classes, and teaching. I will focus on three essential areas that may

be affected by chance events: entering the field due to career change, vocal teachers, and artist managers. Each career path is unique yet common threads in chance events can be identified.

Career Change and Vocal Teachers

Jon Vickers

The renowned Canadian helden-tenor Jon Vickers celebrated his 75th birthday on 20 October 2001. Jonathan Stewart Vickers, born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, in 1926, in his youth sang in church choirs, amateur opera and operettas. After high school, he worked for Safeway stores, then, Woolworth in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; in Winnipeg, he was a purchasing agent for the Hudson Bay Company. In 1949, as a result of singing the tenor lead role in Victor Herbert’s operetta *Naughty Marietta*, combined with Toronto soprano Mary Morrison’s encouragement to study voice seriously, he decided to change careers and left his job (CBC Radio Two, 2000). He settled in Toronto in 1950, with a scholarship at the Toronto Conservatory of music; George Lambert was his teacher and Roy Fenwick, school board music educator, facilitated his participation in the concert series of the Department of Education, and performances in Eastern Canada (MacDonnell & Norman, 2003).

In 1952, he sang the tenor role in the Canadian première of Bruckner’s *Te Deum*, which was tape-recorded; a copy landed in the hands of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra conductor Sir Ernest MacMillan, who invited Vickers to sing in Handel’s *Messiah* with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. Vickers won first prize in Radio Canada’s “*Nos Futures Étoiles*,” and was a finalist on CBC Radio’s “*Singing Stars of Tomorrow*.” He became the leading tenor for six years, including in his repertoire 22 opera roles, 34 oratorios and cantatas, and almost 400 songs (MacDonnell & Norman, 2003). Yet Vickers received “a rocky ride” from the critical establishment in Toronto, to the extent that he commented that “Toronto had ‘torn his heart out.’ For a time, he refused to perform there”

(CBC Radio Two, 2000, ¶ 5). Toronto's reviews were mixed; thus, married and with a child, by the age of 28, Vickers was still thinking about leaving singing for a business career (MacDonnell & Norman, 2003). Sometimes, it is very difficult to be a prophet in one's own land—his case, in retrospect, is one of critics' misjudgments (Runco, 1999).

Vickers longed for international challenging opportunities. His lucky break appeared when, serendipitously, Sir David Webster, of the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, heard him and requested he audition in 1956; after concluding his last note, he was offered a contract for three years. His début at Covent Garden in the role of Riccardo (Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*) was followed by Aeneas in *Les Troyens* (Berlioz), finally receiving deserved rave reviews (Clement, 2001). At Bayreuth, in 1958, his début as Siegmund (*Die Walküre*) was a sensation, and it became one of his signature roles. For his Metropolitan Opera début in 1960, he performed the role of Canio (*I Pagliacci*). His following decades on stage is Canadian opera history (see Paley, 1999).

Ben Heppner

The celebrated Canadian heldentenor Ben Heppner, considered the successor of Vickers, also had a difficult initial road to earn recognition in the field. He started his career as a lyric tenor, winning first prize in the CBC Talent Festival in 1979. Heppner's stage début was as Roderigo (*Otello*) with the Vancouver Opera Association. He sang in church and in the synagogue, and with the Tudor Singers of Montreal, including tenor roles with the Ensemble Studio of the Canadian Opera Company. He married and three children were born, but his career was going nowhere. Frustrated, he set a time limit of one year for his career to take off.

The Canada Council gave Heppner a grant, and he hired voice teacher William Neill, who suggested technical advice to change from lyric to spinto repertoire (Campbell, 1999). In 1987, his voice rapidly made the transition, specializing in German opera, first singing in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Australia in the same year. His US

début was at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, in *Tannhauser*, in the fall of 1988 (So, 2003). Neill, however, had also suggested as a goal the Metropolitan Opera Auditions in March 1988, and prepared him for it. This first breakthrough led to triumph. Heppner was included among 11 winners, and additionally won the Birgit Nilsson Prize, which resulted in his European début at the Royal Swedish Opera, Stockholm, in March 1989, in the role of Lohengrin—suggested to him by Nilsson on the telephone (Campbell, 1999). Then, with the Royal Swedish Opera, he went to Moscow in September 1989, for performances of *Lohengrin* at the Bolshoi Theatre. Unexpectedly, in December 1991, his Metropolitan Opera début was advanced (from later that season) by substituting for an indisposed Pavarotti in *Idomeneo* (Mozart). Today, he has performed on all the major opera stages of the world to great acclaim (So, 2003), and is engaged as Aeneas in *Les Troyens* (Berlioz) at the Metropolitan Opera 2003 season. An appropriate voice teacher can make a world of difference between reaching the top and remaining at ordinary levels of performance.

John McCormack

The Irish-born naturalized eminent American tenor in his times, John McCormack was the fourth of eleven siblings and one of five who survived childhood. His parents, Hannah and Andrew McCormack, were both musical. At 18, however, after his college studies ended John was undecided on a career. He resisted parental suggestions of the priesthood, science, and civil service; he tried the postal service but soon quit. One day, per chance, John took part in a charity concert presented at Sligo Town Hall as a solo vocalist and became enamored with a singing career. His life changed as a result of a traveling mandolinist's suggestion, despite his father's objections, that he ought to sing for Vincent O'Brien, Dublin's leading musical teacher (Manning, 1990). Dr. Dudley Ford took him to O'Brien who happened to need a tenor; a placement in the Palestrina Choir of Dublin's Pro-Cathedral, with a \$125 annual salary, was accepted with

gusto (Key, 1918/1973). From choir-master O'Brien he received his initial lessons in solfège and voice (Douglas, 1995).

In 1902, O'Brien entered McCormack for the tenor competition of the Irish National Music Festival ("*Feis Ceoil*") to take place on May 1903, and he won the gold medal. From this pseudo-serendipitous outcome emerged the opportunity to sing overseas at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition as a member of the Dublin Catholic Church Choir (Thompson, 1975). After returning home early, ambitious McCormack desired to study in Italy and with entrepreneurial spirit he managed to raise money for this project with concerts. Fortuitously, in 1904, he received two invitations to record in London—one from the Edison Company and the other from the Gramophone Company. Then, for the first time in his life, McCormack heard Enrico Caruso sing in *La Bohème*, in the fall of 1904 at Covent Garden, and was greatly impacted with his voice. In an interview in 1917, McCormack declared to Pierre Key (1918/1973) that this performance was the heretofore "best lesson" ever taken and an indescribable "stimulus." He also noted that the voice of Caruso had lingered in his ears for a long time and, undoubtedly, would always stay there. He had looked up to him, and still did, "as a supremely gifted artist; unique . . . standing apart from the rest as a model for all" (in Worth, 1997, chap. 1, ¶ 8).

McCormack arrived in Milan in spring of 1905, and studied with maestro Vincenzo Sabatini; he returned to Ireland for four summer months and by September was back in Milan. By December, Sabatini had prepared him for his début in Savona, at the Teatro Chiabrera, on 13 January 1906—with the alias of Giovanni Foli—in the title role of *L'Amico Fritz* (Mascagni). The critics were positive, but he considered himself only "mildly accepted." Sabatini gave his approval, predicting McCormack's ultimate success. But he warned the young tenor that a role would be played by good luck (Worth, 1997, chap. 1). After another presentation in the small town of Santa Croce del Arno, near Florence, in which his voice cracked on a high note singing

Faust (Gounod), he astutely realized that the road to success in Italy would be hard indeed. He returned to Milan for his farewell to Sabatini and sailed home in May of 1906. He married Irish soprano Lily Foley in July, and after a change of plans, they returned to Milan. This move was unsuccessful as no engagements were forthcoming. Short of cash, and with their first child on the way, they made the decision to relocate to London at summer's end, where he hoped for better opportunities (Worth, 1997).

McCormack revealed (Key, 1918/1973): "We hadn't been long back in our small quarters in London before Fortune permitted herself to smile, just a little, upon us" (in Worth, 1997, chap. 1, 1906, ¶ 3). Soon he landed a six-year recording contract with Odeon, and found brief engagements that at least permitted them to survive and for him to practice in public. He searched intensely for opportunities everywhere.

After Christmas of 1906, McCormack met Albert Vesetti, Royal College of Music professor of singing. Impressed with his voice, Vesetti gave McCormack two letters of introduction. Both were addressed to rival music publishers: one to Chapells' William Boosey and the other to his cousin Arthur Boosey, owner of Boosey & Company. The latter unexpectedly opened the door to success and riches when he least expected it, providing his early career development with a lucky break all artists need and desire. Arthur Boosey organized Ballad Concerts at Queen's Hall in London. Greatly impressed with McCormack's audition, he contracted him to sing on 1 March 1907, in the elite company of known artists. His successful performance ensured his job with Boosey for the rest of the season and the following one. Requests of aristocrats to perform in their private soirées also materialized—an excellent extra income source at the time—and he was noticed by Sir John Murray Scott, a wealthy patron of the arts. Eventually, Scott's influence arranged for his protégée an audition with Henry Higgins, general manager of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden (Worth, 1997). On 15 October 1907, McCormack made his successful début at Covent Garden as Turiddu in

Cavalleria Rusticana, singing in the same season in *Rigoletto* and *Don Giovanni*. Twenty three year-old McCormack was the youngest tenor ever at the Royal Opera. Thereafter, every summer season he returned to Covent Garden, from 1908 to 1914 (Shawe-Taylor, 1980/1995).

Two years later, the German-American impresario Oscar Hammerstein engaged him to appear as leading tenor of the Manhattan Opera House, New York—a rival of the Metropolitan Opera—and he made his début on 10 November 1909, in *La Traviata*. McCormack, however, owed this lucky turning point to soprano Luisa Tetrazzini. Her début at Covent Garden had occurred in the identical season as his and in all the history of the Royal Opera, hers was the most sensational one. On 23 November 1907, he had performed as the Duke of Mantua (*Rigoletto*) with her. Tetrazzini wrote in her autobiography that when performing in London she had met "John McCormack, the Irish tenor with the God-given voice. I found that his rich voice went so well with mine that I took him back with me to America . . . the Americans took John McCormack to their hearts" (Douglas, 1995, p. 137). Fate placed them on stage together, serendipitously, their voices blended well, and pseudo-serendipitously, Tetrazzini had the power to secure him the engagement in America. In effect, "Hammerstein had not been enthused about hiring the young Irishman but he acceded to the request of his star soprano, Luisa Tetrazzini" (Dolan, 1974, ¶ 2). McCormack is the best recalled Hammerstein star today, as after leaving the opera stage he became "the greatest concert attraction in history" (¶ 2). For five seasons (1910-1918) McCormack also sang at the Metropolitan Opera (Shawe-Taylor, 1980/1995). He was named papal count in 1928. McCormack's career history reveals his single-minded determination to succeed, persistence to overcoming obstacles, flexibility to change plans, optimism, performance creativity, and touches of serendipity and pseudo-serendipity along the way.

Richard Tucker

In another case of career change,

by contrast, the Metropolitan Opera doors opened quickly, also due to the aid of the vocal teacher. Briefly, Richard Tucker, the great Brooklyn, New York born tenor, nee Reuben Ticker in 1913, began to sing at the age of six as a boy alto at the Tifereth Israel synagogue, on the Lower East Side; he remained under the tutelage of Cantor Samuel Weisser for seven years until his voice changed. His father was a middleman in the fur industry and Richard worked as a salesman. In 1936, when he married Sara Perelmuth (only sister of tenor Jan Peerce), he was making per week \$25,00 selling furs, plus a little extra from singing at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs which helped to pay for voice lessons from Cantor Joseph Mirsky (Davis, 1997).

In 1942, Tucker failed to win the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air, so he continued with his cantorial work. In 1943, he had started gain prominence on the radio—*The Chicago Theatre of the Air* and *Music from the House of Squibb*. He became cantor at the Brooklyn Jewish Center, where weekly a large congregation of rich and prominent individuals had the opportunity to hear him. His teacher, dramatic tenor Paul Althouse, recommended to him by his brother-in-law and rival, persuaded Canadian tenor Edward Johnson, the Metropolitan Opera general manager (1935-1950), to attend a service at the Brooklyn Jewish Center. Quite impressed, Johnson told him to forget about the Met Auditions. "If you can satisfy the critical ears of two thousand people in this prestigious temple, you can satisfy any audience at the Metropolitan Opera House" (Davis, 1997, p. 427). A clear example of planned happenstance due to the agency of his teacher. The contract, however, mainly contained comprimario parts and cover jobs, with a *Rosenkavalier* début in the minor role of the Italian tenor who only sings for five-minutes. Tucker took the risk of telling Eddie Johnson, Frank St. Leger, and others at the meeting, that he was not willing to perform *Rosenkavalier*, or be the cover of anybody. He would enter the Metropolitan "through the front door, not through the back" (p. 427). As the Met had a need for tenors for the 1944-45 seasons, his gamble

paid off. Tucker successfully debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in the role of Enzo (*La Gioconda*), on 25 January 1945 (Bernheimer, 1980/1995). It requires self-confidence to take such a risk.

In his history of the Metropolitan Opera, Kolodin (1966) noted that when finally Tucker focused his mayor efforts on opera, “the Metropolitan acquired its most beautiful tenor voice since Gigli’s” (p. 452). In 1947, he sang the same role for his European debut in Arena di Verona, with an unknown soprano lead who was making her debut—Maria Callas. Tucker was the Met’s “House Tenor” for almost 30 years, until his death (Anthonisen, 2000). Of Rudolph Bing, the next Metropolitan Opera manager in 1950, Tucker commented at the end of his regime in 1972, “Let’s say I did well by him and he did well by me” (Davis, 1997, p. 428). A successful relationship for both is essential for job satisfaction.

Successful Business Partnerships

Managers are known to scout for artists, instead of waiting for them to knock on their doors, per chance, through referrals—pseudo-serendipitous discoveries that yield economic results for both sides, if these artists become prominent. For artists, of course, suddenly being discovered by influential managers is an unplanned, serendipitous event.

The famous American tenor Jan Peerce, nee Jacob Pincus Perelmuth, was born in the Lower East Side, New York, in 1904, of Jewish Eastern European immigrant parents. Peerce’s early exposure to music began as a toddler by accompanying his parents to synagogue services. For Anna Perelmuth, however, music was not a social grace but a necessity for her son; as a piano was beyond their budget, the chosen instrument was a fiddle. To pay for the best lessons with H.M. Shapiro at his 110th Street studio across town, she quickly created a small private restaurant business in their home; later she expanded it and even had some lodgers. Peerce attended Dewitt Clinton High School and his vocal lessons started after his voice broke. More intent on violin studies than on his voice, Peerce

formed, with four peers from the neighborhood, the *Pinky Pearl and His Society Dance Band*, charging four dollars each plus tips to perform at social events. During the summer, they performed at the Catskills and Peerce started to toss in some vocals in addition to his fiddling which were applauded (Davis, 1997).

In 1928, he married Alice Kalmanowitz. During the following few years, Pinky Pearl performed, playing and singing on this route until an audition with the Broadway impresario Earl Carroll was arranged by an influential fan who heard him singing. This chance opportunity came to nothing because Peerce demanded \$125, 00 per week, and talent-booker Tom Rooney laughed at his nerve, criticizing his unattractive looks—short, stocky, with big thick eyeglasses—about which Peerce had a lifelong complex (Davis, 1997).

After that fiasco, however, soon Samuel Lionel (“Roxy”) Rothafel discovered Peerce. Roxy was another pioneer on Broadway who aimed to unite good music with entertainment and give the masses both (e.g., the Roxy Theatre and the Roxyettes later renamed the Rockettes). He told Peerce to get rid of the fiddle and focus on his voice which would produce riches for him. “You just sing, sing the best you can . . . and you’ll be beautiful! You study and you sing and you’ll be even taller and handsomer and more good-looking than you are now!” (Davis, 1997, p. 419). What a boost to his self-esteem. Roxy became the ideal manager for Pinky at this stage of his career. He offered his new protégée a permanent place on his popular *Radio City Music Hall of the Air* program, found him a teacher, and gave him a new stage name: John Pierce. In 1932, with the opening at Rockefeller Center, New York, of the Radio City Music Hall—a 6200 seat theater, which was then the world’s largest—Peerce became a regular performer in its extravaganzas, and also at the Center Theater shows. During the next eight years, Peerce was a very busy singer in town, particularly on the radio—*The A & P Gypsies*, *The Chevrolet Hour*, and *Forverts*. His voice impressed listeners nationwide and on the radio his unflattering looks no longer mattered. Then, in 1936,

Peerce sang “The Bluebird of Happiness” and it turned into “his signature song” until the day he died (p. 420; see also Peerce, 1976). When the decade ended, Roxy already had suggested another name-change, and both agreed on Jan Peerce.

Later, maestro Arturo Toscanini heard Peerce singing Act I of *Die Walküre* (Wagner) on a Radio City Music Hall broadcast, and decided that this was the tenor he required for the upcoming performance of his NBC Symphony Orchestra of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* in 1938. Thus, by serendipity, Peerce became “Toscanini’s tenor” in an association that lasted for 15 years, which led to many recordings and broadcasts (Davis, 1997). Included were *Fidelio*, *La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and others (Bernheimer, 1980/1995b).

Peerce then studied with contralto Marian Anderson’s teacher, world-famous tenor/coach Giuseppe Boghetti. It was precisely this link that caught the attention of Anderson’s manager, Russian-American impresario Solomon (“Sol”) Hurok and the Metropolitan Opera. After singing a few arias, Hurok told him: “All right, Pirs, you’ll be my artist” (Davis, 1997, p. 420). And so it was for the next four decades, with only a verbal contract—20% for concerts and 10% for records & radio. On 14 May 1938, in Philadelphia, Peerce had his stage debut as the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*. His New York recital première followed on 7 November 1939 (Thompson, 1975). On 19 October 1941, Peerce made his debut at the San Francisco Opera as the Duke (*Rigoletto*). The beckoning to audition for Edward Johnson at the Metropolitan Opera came two weeks later and immediately he became of member of the company. His Metropolitan Opera debut on 29 November 1941, as Alfredo in *La Traviata*, at a Saturday matinee was broadcasted (Davis, 1997, Thompson, 1975; see also Metopera.org, 1940-1943). A serendipity spin-off. In the final stage of his career, in addition to worldwide tours and appearances in films and television, he made his Broadway debut in 1971, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, in the role of Tevye (Bernheimer, 1980/1995b). Each man-

ager who pseudo-serendipitously discovered Peerce, and believed in him, made a significant contribution to building his career. From Peerce's vista, to have been unexpectedly discovered by Roxy, Toscanini, and Hurok, was apparently pure serendipity.

Concluding Remarks

In all prominent opera careers, an exceptional vocal instrument combined with hard work, persistence, belief in self, and optimism, are key elements for high levels of success. Invariably, chance events can facilitate breakthroughs and career advancement in this highly competitive field. Historic data suggest that chance options no longer can be ignored in career development of opera singers and the use of planned happenstance theory is applicable, as underscored in the selected vignettes. For vocational and career counselors, examples of chance events in the client's field are a useful tool to stimulate exploratory thinking for future action; illustrations from unrelated fields are less effective. This presentation is an initial effort in this direction.

Opera is an unexplored niche of highly creative, well prepared performing artists. As qualitative research findings depend on questions asked in open-ended interview protocols, three major areas affected by chance were addressed. Prominent singers and voice teachers may be willing to serve as advisors, revealing even more types of chance events of value for novel studies. In this new millennium, is it not time to study the role of chance events in this overlooked profession in the career and counseling literature? Opera history provides a foundation for empirical studies. All it takes is a couple of creative doctoral students and career researchers who love and enjoy opera to open new paths and others will follow, enriching both fields.

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