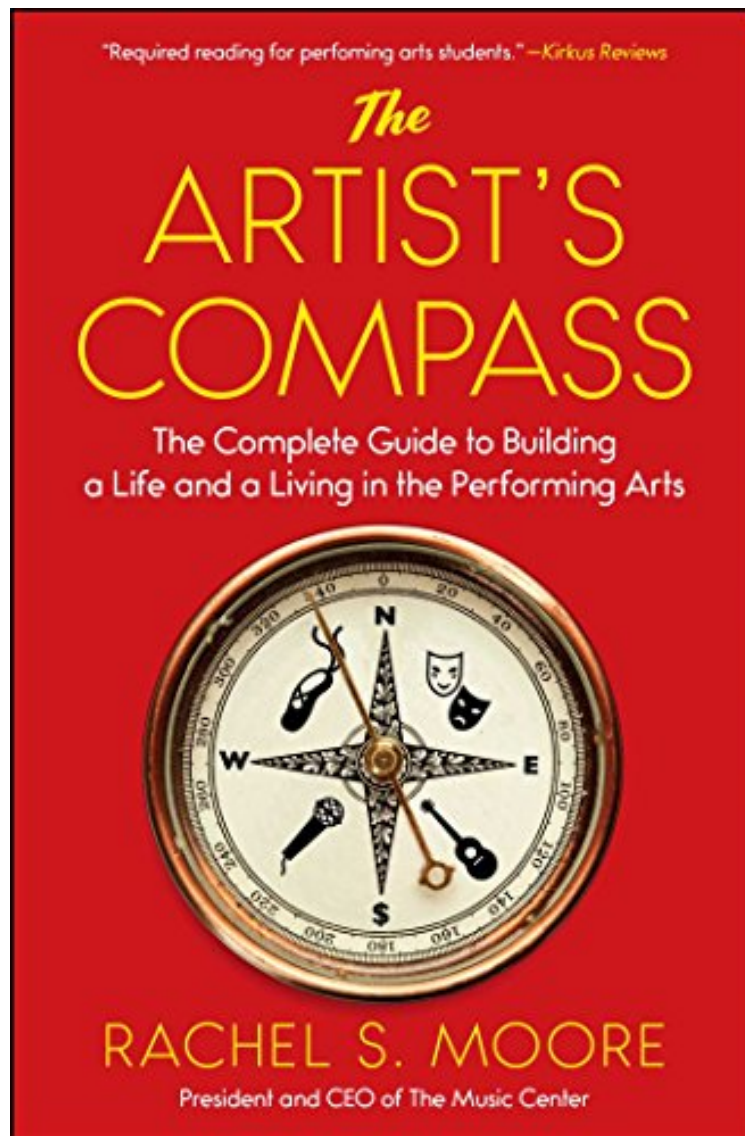


[Download pdf] The Artist's Compass: The Complete Guide to Building a Life and a Living in the Performing Arts

The Artist's Compass: The Complete Guide to Building a Life and a Living in the Performing Arts

Rachel Moore

ebooks | Download PDF | *ePub | DOC | audiobook



 Download

 Read Online

#789499 in eBooks 2016-05-03 2016-05-03 File Name: B010MH9W8Q | File size: 52.Mb

Rachel Moore : The Artist's Compass: The Complete Guide to Building a Life and a Living in the Performing Arts before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Artist's Compass: The Complete Guide to Building a Life and a Living in the Performing Arts:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. easy to understand and intelligently outlined- I recommend this to

...By Judith Gale Brown Clearly presented, easy to understand and intelligently outlined- I recommend this to students, parents, teachers and anyone interested, or involved in, someone who wishes an artistic future. It's an honest and refreshingly modern outline of what awaits young people as they prepare for a career in a very precarious field. Moore has invaluable experience to impart and the youth of today are shrewd enough to understand this and to make use of it. I recommend it highly. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Artist's Compass is a great teaching tool to reference. By Customer I'm a seasoned performing artist and educator. I work with many young people who are interested in having a performing arts career. The Artist's Compass is a great teaching tool to reference. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Thought it was good information for this age group. By Customer Meant as a gift for a teen considering whether to pursue a career in ballet. Thought it was good information for this age group.

An inspiring, real world guide for artists, in the classic bestselling tradition of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, that shows how to build a successful, stable career in the performing arts, from the President and CEO of The Music Center in Los Angeles, who has carved her own success through her creative talent and business skill. While performing artists have many educational opportunities to perfect their craft, they are often on their own when it comes to learning the business skills necessary to launch their careers. At the end of the day, show business is, well, a business. In *The Artist's Compass*, Rachel Moore (who rose from a dancer in the American Ballet Theatre's corps de ballet to become the CEO of that organization—and is today the head of The Music Center in LA) shares how to make life as a performer more successful, secure, and sustainable by approaching a career in the arts like an entrepreneur. Misty Copeland calls Moore "a great example of a woman who used the skills that we gain as dancers to become a leader," and it's those hard-won lessons she imparts to a new generation of artists in this book—encouraging every performer to develop marketable skills alongside their creative talent. With testimonials from artists like Lang Lang, Sigourney Weaver, and Renee Fleming, plus inspiring anecdotes from Moore's own journey in the arts, *The Artist's Compass* teaches aspiring performers how to take charge of their own careers and how to create their own brand and marketing platform to achieve personal and professional success. In an engaging, "realistic, but also passionate" (Publishers Weekly) voice, Moore combines her artistic and corporate experience to address the finer points of building a career in a challenging industry. *The Artist's Compass* is the essential success guide for aspiring artists, driving home the point that honing professional skills beyond the stage is not forsaking one's art, but for the sake of one's art.

"[P]recise and realistic but also passionate, and it will give readers the sense of a much-needed guiding hand. Moore is qualified to become a mentor to a whole new generation of artists, and they will benefit greatly from her advice." (Publishers Weekly) "Sound advice and a complete road map to planning an artistic career." (Library Journal) "Rachel S. Moore, the president and CEO of the Los Angeles Music Center and former CEO of the American Ballet Theatre, is a great example of a woman who used the skills that we gain as dancers to become a leader." (Misty Copeland, principal dancer with the American Ballet Theatre and author of *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*) "Moore's advice is steeped in her professional experience as an arts administrator and enlivened by her experience as a professional ballet dancer. With a genuine passion and desire to help other artists, she outlines her keys to success for a sustainable career. . . . A hopeful and optimistic treatise that will surely be required reading for performing arts students." (Kirkus) About the Author Rachel S. Moore was named President and CEO of the Los Angeles Music Center in 2015. A former member of American Ballet Theatre's corps de ballet, Moore was named Executive Director of ABT in April 2004 and CEO in 2012. Prior to her appointment, she served as Director of Boston Ballet's Center for Dance Education, Executive Director of Project STEP, and Managing Director of Ballet Theatre of Boston. She has also held senior positions with Americans for the Arts and the National Cultural Alliance, both in Washington, DC. As a teenager, she spent summers in New York City and trained on scholarship at the School of American Ballet and American Ballet Theatre School, before becoming a professional ballet dancer. She currently lives in Los Angeles, California with her husband, two Labradors, and four cats of suspect provenance. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *The Artist's Compass* — Chapter One — What Does Success Look Like to You? Assessing Your Goals and Strengths as an Artist It is necessary . . . for a man to go away by himself . . . to sit on a rock . . . and ask of himself, "Who am I, where have I been, and where am I going?" — CARL SANDBURG I love speaking to students about career development, but I've found that whenever I ask what they intend to do after graduation, even the most gifted among them get that deer-in-the-headlights expression in their eyes and draw a complete blank. Why is this such a tough question for so many young artists to answer? I think it's because so many of their waking hours are spent focusing on the details—the exact movement of an arm, the precise fingering of a complex musical passage, the exact inflection of a monologue—that they can lose sight of the big picture: Why am I doing all this hard work, anyway? And what is it that I hope to achieve? What, after all is said and done, does success look like for me? Let's face it, most performing artists spend a lot of time comparing themselves to others in one way or another—physical appearance, intelligence, professional skills, personality,

ambition (or lack thereof), and talent. While these sorts of comparisons may be relatively common, I would venture to say that they are particularly poisonous for those in the performing arts. Don't get me wrong. Self-assessment is not a bad thing. In fact, it's absolutely necessary, so long as it's objective and realistic. Why? Because if we are truly aware of who we are and how we stack up against others in our field, we will be better prepared to define what it is that makes us unique and, therefore, to project that image to the world and make it work to our advantage. The problem is that, for those in the performing arts, this process is especially complicated: For one thing, assuming you've achieved a certain level of proficiency in your chosen field, there is really no objective standard against which to measure any one person's artistry. And because that judgment is subjective at best, what differentiates you from your peers becomes more about style and personality, or what is generally referred to as "voice," than about actual skill level. Your unique voice is ultimately going to be the thing that sets you apart and becomes your artistic calling card. In marketing terms, it will be your brand. As a student of the performing arts, you are schooled to take correction and pursue a virtually unattainable level of perfection, and so your opinion of your own skill level may be skewed by an overdeveloped inner critic or an underdeveloped trust in your own achievements. But demeaning your own abilities in the service of self-assessment or seeming humility is neither helpful nor constructive. As a very wise teacher once said to me, "If you constantly put yourself down—even if you don't particularly believe it—you will end up believing it. How you describe yourself to others and yourself is extremely powerful, so be fair about your strengths and weaknesses, but don't start beating yourself up—you will get nowhere." Two basic truths I've discovered in the course of my own career as well as in the careers of those whom I've mentored and overseen for the last few decades are: 1. In order to be truly happy in your career, you need to define success for yourself rather than letting others define it for you. 2. The key to success in the arts (no matter how you define it) is, in the end, a matter of identifying and following your unique voice as a performer.

DEFINING YOUR VOICE

So what is your voice—your unique personality, perspective, and way of expressing your particular art? You need to value your voice, your particular contribution, figure out how it fits into the changing world of the performing arts, and find a way for that voice to be heard. What is it that you want to say to the world? What special thing do you have to contribute to your art? For me it was being able to feel the music and use what I felt to bring something personal and special to my performance through timing, expression, and technique. Whenever I see a group of young dancers in a classroom, all of whom are on approximately the same level, I look for the one who has an internal perspective that brings something special to everything he or she does. It could be the way she uses her arms, her timing, the way he looks up and out that projects confidence in his performance, or the fact that, when there's room for interpretation, she makes an interesting and elegant choice—not simply to stand out, but always in service of the art. In fact, I believe that in most instances, those who stand out, especially at a young age, make those choices unconsciously, as an organic expression of who they are. The truth of this was brought home to me once again as I recently watched a video showing a class of kids dancing to Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars's "Uptown Funk." Right in the middle of the front row was a tiny eight-year-old—the smallest kid in the group—who was hitting each movement with an energy that just screamed "Watch me!" That kid had attitude, but he also had the coordination and the talent to back it up. The same was true when I was running a classical music school in Boston. There were always those kids who had a really good ear and were technically advanced—and then there were the ones who would actually bring magic to their music. One of them was Tony Rymer, a little boy with a big smile who wanted to be a cellist. It was clear from the moment he walked onto the stage as a second grader that Tony had a gift. His eyes sparkled while he played, his technical skills came naturally, his sound was warm and true, and his performance radiated with an inner confidence. Tony went on to graduate from the New England Conservatory of Music and is now a professional cellist. He has won numerous competitions and performed major concerti to critical acclaim with the Atlanta Symphony, the Boston Pops, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Detroit Symphony. As a young performer you need to figure out what you have to contribute to the world, why you do certain things in a certain way, and why you think they are beautiful or special or compelling. If you don't think you have something special to bring to your art, don't have to say that you probably shouldn't be doing this. It's too hard, and those who are successful are the ones who can't imagine doing anything else because they have something they need to say. One experience I'll never forget occurred when I was dancing in the corps at ABT and the great Russian ballerina Natalia Makarova came to stage a production of *La Bayadère*, an ornate tale of love and revenge set in royal India. In Act II, the warrior Solor is grief-stricken by the murder of his true love, Nikiya, a temple dancer. In a sequence known as "Kingdom of the Shades," Solor has an opium-induced dream during which he encounters twenty-four "shades" who are exact likenesses of Nikiya. The shades, corps members in white tutus, enter one by one, each making precisely the same sequence of slow, sustained movements as the dancer before her, until the stage is filled with row upon row of silent figures moving in complete synchrony. Incredibly beautiful; incredibly difficult. When Makarova came into the room to stage that sequence, I'd guess that all twenty-four of us young shades were terrified. What she told us then was truly an "ah-ha" moment for me: "Each one of you is a princess unto yourself. I want to see each one of you. Yours is special and beautiful. Yours is not just a row of Nikiyas." "Okay," I

thought. "I'm in a line with twenty-three other dancers and we're all doing the same thing. How can I make this special and beautiful unto myself?" I felt as if I'd just been given permission to interpret the movements and bring my own voice to the stage. That was a great gift, but it also came with great responsibility—not simply to follow direction but to think creatively about each movement and put my stamp on everything I did, be it through my unique musicality or a particular physical inflection. Part of what it means to be an artist—whether you're a dancer or a singer or a musician—is finding a way to be individual even when you're doing the same thing as everyone else. It's something every young artist must figure out for him- or herself, both to be competitive at an audition and to bring value to his or her work, whether it is as the lead in a theatrical production, in the chorus of an opera company, part of a musical ensemble, or a member of the corps de ballet, as I was in *La Bayadere*. Whatever your role, however big or small, you will have the opportunity to work with other amazing artists and create beauty on the stage. And, if you are lucky, you will be part of an established group that provides steady employment and organizational support (as opposed to gigging as a freelance artist your entire life), but first you need to project your own special voice so that you stand out from the crowd and get the job. So, how will you define success as an artist? What is the unique brand you want to bring to the world? These are questions that all performers must ask themselves, both at the beginning of their careers, and again at various points moving forward, in order to figure out their artistic mission or purpose and define their priorities as well as their personal and professional strengths. In the words of universally acclaimed, award-winning actress Sigourney Weaver, "It takes a lot of communing with oneself to recognize what you have accomplished and get a clear idea of what you want to do." Thinking honestly about these tough questions is the first step toward building a fulfilling career and an equally fulfilling life. For some of you that will mean a life of performing. For others it could mean playing any one of a variety of roles within the business of the performing arts.

DEFINING YOUR BRAND

There could be an endless number of attributes that go into determining who you are, but when it comes to branding yourself as an artist, it's important to really understand what makes you different and what you bring to the field, and then be as clear and concise as possible about how you express that. If you're wondering how to do it, think in terms of what someone else might say about you if your name came up in a conversation about casting a particular role, or if he were recommending you for a job. To help you figure it out, think of your brand as comprising two distinct sets of attributes—the rational and the emotional.

- Rational Attributes:** These are the specific areas of expertise you bring to the position: What is your unique artistic contribution? What skills do you have? What special professional strengths do you bring to the production to ensure its success? What previous experience do you have that will contribute to your future performance? Directors of companies frequently share notes about performers with one another, and you've often heard leaders of performing arts organizations talk about an artist who "can command the stage," "is technically brilliant," or is "incredible at supporting roles." These are the hard-core skills that get you into the game. Without them, you won't be considered. Think of them as "necessary but not sufficient" for success.
- Emotional Attributes:** These attributes describe the "softer," more personal side of your brand. What is your personality type; your style of interaction; your ability to work in a team; your level of likability, trustworthiness, and reliability? Emotional attributes are the personality characteristics and life experiences that make you interesting and different. Added to your rational attributes, they can either help or hinder your ability to connect with people. There are artists who are absolutely brilliant onstage whom no one will hire because of their bad attitude, their unreliability, or their refusal to work with a director, preferring to do things "their own way." Taken together, your rational and emotional attributes define what you have that is unique in the marketplace, what makes you special and worth hiring, and thus what is your personal brand. So let's take a moment to figure out your own rational and emotional attributes. On a piece of paper, write down these four aspects of what makes each of us unique.

- Core values.** These are the aspects of your character that describe who you are deep down and what values you hold dear. Examples might include thoughtfulness, trustworthiness, courage, respect, integrity, being honest, being open, helping others, or being reliable.
- Artistic strengths.** These might include extreme musicality; an ability with accents, learning scores, ballets, or scripts quickly; the ability to transform the prosaic into something original; stage presence; adaptability; vision; technical skills; the ability to take criticism; creative problem solving; being collaborative, imaginative, a good communicator.
- Personality.** These attributes describe how you interact with the world and are perceived by others. For example: being positive, creative, strategic, focused, confident, friendly, energetic, patient, flexible, passionate, unflappable, having a sense of humor.
- Image.** This is the image you project to others based on your personal look or style or language. Such as: sophisticated, elegant, edgy, classic, hip, cultured, chic, sexy, urbane.

Now, write down the words you would use to describe yourself in each of these categories. You may want to enlist a friend or a colleague to help you figure out how others see you—and to keep you honest. Simply tell them you need help with a branding exercise and ask them to describe you candidly and honestly. Once you have a list, try to figure out how to link these attributes to one another. How your personal qualities fit together will be key to determining who you are and developing your brand. For instance, are you a visionary artist who can work with anyone? Or are you a master technician who is completely reliable and can be counted on to perform in any situation?

If, for example, someone asks you what you do, don't just say, "I'm a violinist." Instead you might say, "I'm a classical violinist with a focus on integrating new technology into my work so that it is more accessible to others," or, "I'm a choreographer, and I am working on ways to create narrative works using a new dance vocabulary." My own tagline is that I like to see myself as an entrepreneurial leader. Regardless of the specifics, think about how you would quickly and succinctly capture yourself in a personal tagline. Now that you have a sense of how you see yourself and how others see you, you can craft a personal "message" to help you communicate your brand to potential employers, colleagues, audience members, patrons, and the broader public.

DEFINING YOUR MISSION OR PURPOSE AS AN ARTIST

Artists are mission- or goal-driven. Some even regard their work as a calling. They feel they have something special to add to the world and thus they are willing to work tirelessly and overcome great challenges in order to make their personal artistic contribution. In my philosophy classes at Brown, the professors used to say that when you are justifying an argument, you need to meet the "Oh yeah" and "So what" challenges. By this they meant that you need to explain "oh yeah" or "Why do you think this is right? How are you justifying your claim?" But even if you are able to do that, it isn't enough. You also need to explain why anyone should care, thus answering the question, "So what?" Both Andrew Simonet, founder and director of Artists U, and Susan Mohini Kane, a classical soprano and voice teacher, suggest that crafting an "Artists' Mission Statement" will help emerging performers articulate both for themselves and for others the reason(s) they exist as artists. This statement must be clear and based on personal beliefs and values. Consider the following questions and jot down your answers, as you may want to return to them again and again. Why is your work significant or essential to you? What is it that makes you passionate about your work? For me, it was believing that, through dance, I was creating moments of great beauty that spoke of what I thought was true in the world. I thought this would help to change the way people saw the world, and, consequently, help to change the world. Beyond your own personal interest or benefit, why should your work matter to others? Why do you think people connect to it and care about it? How is it different from others', and why is that important? Keep in mind that you are in a performing art form, where the audience's relationship to your work is critical, so this question must be answered compellingly. This will probably be difficult for you to articulate, but it is essential that you figure it out if you are ever going to differentiate yourself from the crowd and engage a substantial audience.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

How you assess yourself and chart your course moving forward will depend on where you are right now. If you're just at the beginning of your journey and have not yet graduated from high school, you and your parents need to discuss your plans for getting your diploma. As I found out for myself, it's important to keep your options open. Anything can happen to any one of us at any time. You may need or want to change your career course and do something entirely different, even if you can't imagine such a thing at this point in your life. Therefore, you need to figure out how you can pursue your arts training while still keeping up academically. For example, look into the various summer programs available to you and check out those options. If you're at the point of applying to a conservatory or a college-level performing arts program, consider whether the schools you're applying to offer classes that will help you prepare for the professional world you're hoping to enter, such as courses in the business of the performing arts or career planning. If you have some idea of what you're going to do with your training before you have to enter the job market, you'll be that much ahead of the game (which is exactly why I'm writing this book in the first place). If you're past the point of applying and are now attending or have recently graduated from a professional training school, it's time to think about why you are so committed to performing. What is it that compels you to pursue your chosen art form? What particular skills do you bring to the professional table? What is it that makes you stand out in the ever-changing world of the performing arts business?

WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE

AND HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

If you're being honest, I'm sure you're all aware, at least to some degree, that you're better at some things than others, and the things you're good at are generally also the things we love most. Knowing where you excel will certainly help you to find your particular niche in the marketplace; and, in all probability, the jobs you most enjoy; but it's still necessary to reach a certain level of expertise in every aspect of your field in order to be competitive. If you want to pursue a career in musical theater, for example, it's important to sing and act well, but if you can also dance well, you'll be that much more likely to get hired. I should also make it clear at this point that being multitalented does not in any way mean you shouldn't home in on the particular strength that guides and infuses everything you do. All it means is that you'll have more outlets for expression while developing other marketable skills. I can think of no two better examples to illustrate this important point than the careers of Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein, both of whom excelled (often in collaboration) in the worlds of both the popular and classical aspects of their fields. During his time as a classical ballet dancer (a soloist with ABT from 1941 to 1944) and choreographer (most notably with New York City Ballet), he was also producing, directing, and choreographing Broadway and Hollywood musicals. In 1944 he conceived and choreographed the original Broadway production of *On the Town*, for which Bernstein wrote the music. In 1957, the year Leonard Bernstein was appointed music director of the New York Philharmonic, a position he held until 1969, the two collaborated again, this time on creating, writing, and producing *West Side Story*. I feel it is safe to say that no one

familiar with their work would ever question the fact that each of these multitalented stars of their chosen fields brought an extremely strong, consistent, and uniquely identifiable voice to each and every one of his endeavors. And their spirit of collaboration and diversification goes on: several dancers from New York City Ballet as well as American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Misty Copeland have appeared in the recent Broadway revival of *On the Town*, and Christopher Wheeldon, a well-known ballet choreographer, is directing the Broadway production of *An American in Paris*. Cenovia Cummins, a classical violinist, is currently the concertmaster of the New York Pops, Riverside Symphony, and the School of American Ballet Orchestra. She is also an active chamber musician, having played with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and the Grand Canyon and Moab music festivals. And she has played backup for popular singers ranging from Tony Bennett to P. Diddy, and Barbra Streisand to Rod Stewart. She is the poster child for entrepreneurial diversification and offers this advice to other young artists:

1. Educate yourself about the world. It makes for a better artist.
2. Try to diversify yourself. [In addition to the violin, Cenovia plays the viola, mandolin, piano, and guitar.]
3. Be flexible; don't automatically say no to a gig that you think is beneath you. You may meet people and it may open opportunities you didn't know existed.
4. Always be positive. People are attracted to positive energy. Even if you don't feel terribly positive, put on a positive front.
5. Always try to be the best version of the person you want to be.

Like artists themselves, the arts industry as a whole is, of necessity, evolving to be more open and flexible in order to attract new and diverse audiences. The Music Center, for one, is always seeking to work with artists who are forward-looking, able to collaborate with a variety of art forms, and use technology in new and interesting ways. If an artist can do something that is unique and relevant to twenty-first-century audiences, performing arts organizations of all types will be open to hiring that person. Any real artist will want to improve all their skills all the time, just because they want to get better at what they do. But being an "all-arounder" performer and being open to trying new things will also make you a more marketable one, helping you to build new connections and create more performance opportunities. More and more often, in order to broaden their audiences, classical venues and productions are partnering with popular artists and popular music. The New York Philharmonic has performed an extremely well-received concert featuring the music from *Star Wars*, and in the winter of 2015 Renee Fleming, the renowned American-born operatic soprano, was joined by Broadway singer Kelli O'Hara in a production of Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* at the Metropolitan Opera. Boundaries between the so-called high and low arts are fast disappearing, and it's becoming more important than ever for performers to focus on what is beautiful and fulfilling, wherever that is found.

A Word About Career Choices I rebelled against a "golden age" model that set specific repertoire, and a specific career path that great singers of previous generations had followed. I was more interested in singing lesser-known roles, and I wanted to branch out stylistically. That "golden age" template was very much a European model. As an American-born and raised singer, I needed to incorporate my own taste and sensibility, which include the popular genres that I had listened to growing up.

••• I believe a broader approach to musicianship is increasingly important for young performers. Singers today need to be prepared to learn quickly, perform new music, and cultivate the artistic flexibility to embrace nontraditional styles of performance and theatrical skills. [But none of this is a substitute for hard technical work, and the development of one's artistry, style, language, audition techniques, and the vast body of knowledge that underlies the classical music tradition.]

Renee Fleming In addition to developing and broadening your technical skill set, however, you also need to work on mastering mental toughness and developing a realistic sense of what is possible for you. I remember seeing a T-shirt years ago that said, "Tough but Fair," and that's how you need to be with yourself. You may not ever be able to do everything you wish you could, but you do need to develop the skills you have to the highest degree of which you are capable. And if you wish you could do something (jump higher, hit a higher note, cry on cue) as well as somebody else, remember that he or she is probably just as envious of something you can do better. We are not, after all, just "a row of Nikiyas." The problem is that most of us want to do the things we're good at and have to push ourselves to do what makes us uncomfortable. A perfect example of someone who understood this is David Hallberg, a principal dancer with ABT who joined the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow as a premier danseur in 2011 and now splits his season between the two. His reasons were twofold: there was a particular Bolshoi coach he wanted to work with, and he also felt that he wanted to learn more about the unique style of the Bolshoi Ballet and to work on his jumps, an area for which the Bolshoi is world renowned. Not everyone will have the wherewithal to go off and do this on their own, but there is help out there for those who may have the will but not the means. For example, there are many exchange programs that allow young performers to experience what it's like to work with different organizations in different venues. And organizations such as the Annenberg Foundation give grants to help mid-career artists get the additional training that will, in effect, fill the gaps in their skills and help them move to the next level. Keep that in mind; we'll be discussing these possibilities in greater detail in Chapter 6. When I was in the process of changing careers, one of the best pieces of advice I received was from an executive recruiter who told me, in essence, "If you want to get a top job in arts management, you need to take a good hard look at your resume, figure out where the gaps are, and pursue jobs that will help you fill those gaps." Consider the advice and stories you've just read and ask yourself: Are there aspects of

your art or professional skill set that you could develop in order to make you a more marketable performer? In years past, there were many large companies willing to invest in the development of young artists with talent, but those are fast disappearing, and it is becoming more and more important for emerging artists to become self-starters and create their own opportunities. The incubators for developing artists may be largely gone, but so are the gatekeepers, which means that anyone can create their own opportunities if they're clever enough, determined enough, and talented enough to assess the marketplace and take advantage of what's out there. In Chapter 3 we're going to be talking in detail about how you can create those opportunities for yourself. For now, I just want you to consider that self-marketing as well as self-development are going to be critical to how you get from where you are to where you want to be in your career as a performing artist.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH CHANGE?

With a few daredevil exceptions, most of us humans don't really like change. We like to know what's going to happen; we like to have a routine. As a student, you probably knew pretty much how each day was going to go for you—so many hours of class; so many hours of practice. Get up and go to bed in the same place at the same time every day. As a professional, however, things are likely to be a lot less predictable, particularly as the world of the performing arts is evolving today. In Chapter 2 we'll be talking a lot more about those changes and how some artists are using them to their advantage, but the bottom line is that technology is fast changing the face of what we have always thought of as the classical arts. There are fewer and fewer "permanent jobs" to be had in any discipline, and except for those few of you who become members of an orchestra, a ballet, an opera, or a repertory theater company, you'll be working many different gigs (if you're lucky) or at least trying out for many different jobs that could last for a few weeks or a few months, or just a couple of days. And that doesn't even include the jobs you thought would last at least a few months that crashed and burned almost at once. But even within a company it is not uncommon for a performer to play at least two different roles in different vehicles in the course of a single day. Even more likely, however, is that, as a freelancer you will "gig" in multiple jobs in a single day. There are, for example, many musicians who substitute in pit orchestras on Broadway, in which case a single musician could easily play in one show for the matinee, in another for the evening performance, and then in a third show for the matinee the following day. Change has always been a constant in the performing arts, but this is truer now than ever before. The goal is to acknowledge that fact and make it work to your advantage. If you can't, or if you stubbornly refuse to adapt, you will simply get left behind. More and more, the successful artist is the one who is constantly looking forward, saying, "I see things changing. I need to be proactive; I have to find a way to be the master of my fate and figure out how I am going to fit into the future." Adam Shankman, director, choreographer, and Hollywood producer, reframed his artistic skills by capitalizing on the creation of music videos and the increased use of popular dance in movies and TV shows. A former Juilliard student, Shankman started his career by dancing in music videos with Paula Abdul and Janet Jackson before moving on to choreograph numerous films. He has also directed movies and television programs including *Hairspray*, the film adaptation of the Broadway musical *Rock of Ages*, and multiple episodes of *Glee*. As with many things in life, when you come up against a barrier, you need to find a way to get over it or around it rather than stamping your foot in frustration and saying it isn't fair that the barrier exists. You can't simply dig in your heels and demand that the world adapt to your way of doing things. That's just not happening, and that's why technological change is so scary for so many people. It's important to get into a mindset that makes you receptive to change and allows you to embrace it as a welcome challenge and an opportunity to grow. In the world of opera, the introduction of high-definition broadcasts of performances to theaters across the globe has proved to be a difficult transition for some singers, who have had to become more aware of their physical appearance (those close-ups can be tough) and both willing and able to participate in live interviews during the intermissions. Those artists who have adapted and embraced this new way of distributing opera will be more successful as professionals today and tomorrow.

HOW WILLING ARE YOU TO TAKE RISKS?

If you're resistant to change, and if you find yourself extremely anxious and ill each time you have to go onstage, it's safe to say that you really don't like taking risks. Getting ahead in any business—and that includes the performing arts—often means taking calculated risks. If you're not willing to take on the challenge of trying something new when the opportunity presents itself, you may find yourself doing the same thing over and over. That may be what works for you, and it's okay, so long as you don't try to force yourself to be someone you're not—which takes us right back to the question of who you are and how you define success. Some artists actually feel so strongly that risk is integral to what they do and how they grow artistically that they purposefully seek out work that scares them. Kate Winslet for one has been widely quoted as stating that she "wouldn't dream of working on something that didn't make my gut rumble and my heart want to explode." If you're seriously risk averse, if you hate change, if the thought of doing something you've never done before or appearing in front of a live audience makes you break out in a cold sweat, you might need to rethink what success means for you—maybe it's working at a smaller company, doing community-based work, or taking smaller roles. Maybe that's your brand: you're great at what you do; you're dependable; you show up and give it your all every day. Those of us who administer arts organizations need and depend upon people like you. Or it might even mean that filming or recording in a studio setting or working behind the scenes is the right choice for you. Again, it comes down to determining what it is about

performing that is truly meaningful to you and what special gift you have to provide. Opera in the Digital Age

“Since I began my career, the music industry has undergone radical changes in every genre, classical music included. Digital distribution of recorded music has been slower in its effect on classical, but the general direction is the same. The days of walking into the ‘opera rooms’ at Tower Records to thumb through CDs are over. There are advantages to this. Music doesn’t have to exist in silos, physically separated by genre. Listeners can follow their musical interests wherever they lead, with the click of a mouse. There has been a vast expansion of available, free ways to encounter the arts and entertainment, and not only via the Internet. Even older programming platforms like television have gone from a handful of networks to thousands of choices. I remember, as a student, constantly spending precious time and energy chasing recordings of music I needed to research. Now a performer can find almost anything on YouTube, or music streaming sites, and often multiple recordings of the same piece.

“However, without the filter provided by the major labels, it can seem overwhelming to peruse the amount of music that’s available now. Labels provided a service by screening new talent, promoting potential stars, and coaching them on media engagement.” —Renee Fleming

SUCCESS IS PERSONAL—BUT ALSO RELATIVE

Assuming yours is now certain this is your path, it’s time to envision the end goal. I know that when I was in the corps of ABT, there were dancers I looked up to as stars, who had achieved what seemed to me like phenomenal levels of success. But when I spoke to them many years later about their careers and told them how much I admired them, I was truly shocked to hear responses like, “Yes, I had a good career, but I was never as good as so-and-so. He (or she) was truly brilliant!” In fact, Kevin McKenzie, formerly a principal dancer of ABT and currently the company’s artistic director, is a prime example of how unproductive such comparisons can be. Despite having achieved the highest levels of success in his profession, at the time he was dancing he was also comparing his own career unfavorably to some of his contemporaries. Only in retrospect has he realized that those comparisons were not necessarily helpful or fair, but they were significant to him at the time. Hearing this from Kevin and others has made me realize how subjective (and elusive) a thing success really is, even for the most elite performers. With that in mind, when it comes to self-assessment, there is also the issue of how you personally define success. Most of us, I’d guess, start out determined, or at least hoping, to become stars—maybe a leading soprano or tenor with an opera company, a principal dancer with a ballet company, concert master in an orchestra, name above the title in a Broadway show. But the fact is that for the vast majority of us, this will not happen, and given the changes in the field, it is even less likely to happen now than it was twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. As a performer in today’s world, you may need to recalibrate your sense of what is successful. I know this may sound disheartening, but your ability to embrace and manage its truth could easily determine whether or not you feel fulfilled as a professional. I know that in the course of my own career as a performer there came a point when I realized I was never going to move beyond being a member of the corps de ballet. I was talented, and I worked hard, but there were, quite simply, others who were more naturally gifted than I was, who could do the huge leaps and pirouettes I could never achieve. I came to the painful recognition that there is a level of that indefinable something called natural talent that makes some people stars. The reason they are stars is that they are truly gifted in some special way. I can still clearly remember standing in the wings of the Metropolitan Opera House watching Gelsey Kirkland perform and realizing that I would never be able to do what she did. I didn’t have her natural coordination or stage presence, and no amount of work, rehearsals, or classes was going to change that fact. I needed to accept my limitations and work to make a fulfilling career, even if I was not destined to be the next prima ballerina of American Ballet Theatre. Even if you are not destined to become the next Baryshnikov, or Yo Yo Ma, or Renee Fleming, or Meryl Streep of your generation, there is still no reason why you shouldn’t have an enormously impactful and satisfying career. As an artist, however, you do need to look deeply into yourself and ask what it is you really want from a performing career. If success for you means being a star, and only a star, there are certain choices you will have to make along the way. You may need to ask yourself, “If I’m not going to be a star, do I quit the field or do I reassess my choices?” You first need to be clear about what makes the work meaningful to you—the connection with an audience, bringing new life to a classic work, pushing the boundaries of the art form, bringing the performing arts to new audiences in new ways. As Adam Huttler, executive director of Fractured Atlas, a nonprofit organization that supports artists, told me, so long as you are flexible and keep an open mind, there will be many opportunities for you to be successful and feel fulfilled even though your career may end up looking different from what you initially envisioned. But you also need to consider some extremely wise advice I received when I was very young: to be a professional dancer you cannot simply “want it,” you must “need it.” If you don’t “need it,” chances are that you will not be truly happy in your career choice. And the same holds true for a career in any of the performing arts. Remember that the purpose of this book is to help you build a life and a living in the performing arts. Becoming the best you can be as an artist is one key to doing that. The other is finding your own comfort zone within your chosen field. I can’t promise you that following my advice is going to make you rich or make you a star, but I can promise that, if you truly need it, I can help you to live a more fulfilling life as an artist while you are also making a living in a field you love.