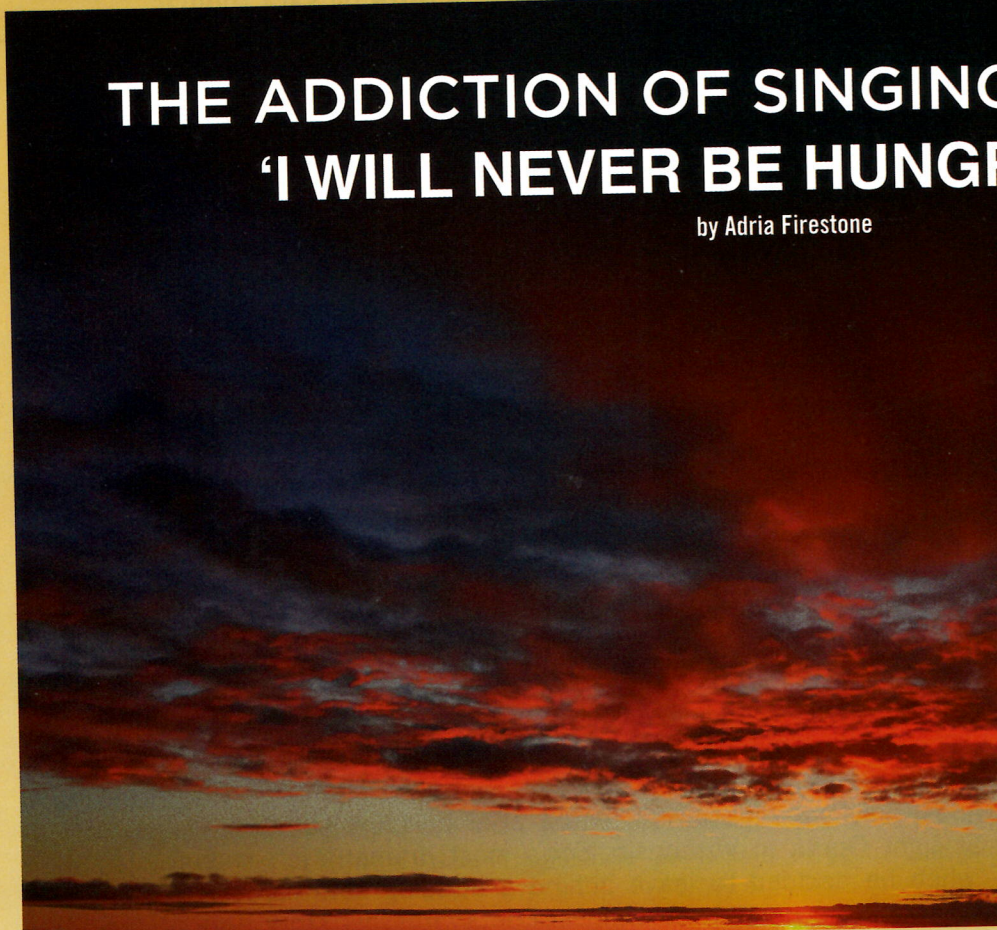


THE ADDICTION OF SINGING, PART THREE 'I WILL NEVER BE HUNGRY AGAIN!'

by Adria Firestone



*Suffering was the only thing that
made me feel I was alive . . .
I haven't got time for the pain
I haven't got room for the pain
I haven't the need for the pain
(Carly Simon/Jacob Brackman)*

In our continued discussion of retiring from singing, Adria Firestone gets at the heart of the matter: determining why we sing, as well as our needs and wants on and off the stage. This is a must-read article for singers at every career level to start you on the road to emotional freedom and happiness.

So here we are, not able to fit, for a variety of reasons, into the only vision of ourselves that seems perfect. You sacrifice everything on the altar of art, and still no one hires you.

Have you forgotten the roles caprice and luck play? Think about the velvet-voiced baritone whose face and body are suited only for character roles. Think about the soprano with great high notes, about the bass with easy E-flats—and still no one hires them.

No matter how loveable you are, you can't *make* someone love you. You can fascinate them for a few minutes but you can't make anyone love you or your voice.

So why do we try so hard? Why is it a failure, in our own eyes and in others', if we leave singing? When a corporate vice president leaves a company after 25 years, he gets a bonus package, and at his retirement dinner everyone tells him how wonderful he is. For a singer, however, they

say, "Whew, those high notes are gone," just as for a major league pitcher they say, "His fastball sure isn't what it used to be," and for an actress they say, "How sad—she looks so old."

We need to reassess our true worth. It doesn't mean we need to give up. Instead, we must change *how* we do what we love, and most importantly, *why* we do it.

This business is horrifically cruel. In the movie *Sunset Boulevard*, we have the privilege of seeing Gloria Swanson play a courageous actress, delivering painful, true material. What we offer as singers is not a skill that happens outside of our bodies. It comes from inside of us. We are giving our very breath, and to have that offering, that breath—our life itself—ripped apart is more painfully personal. As singers, the needier we are, the more we set ourselves up for abuse.

For me, I needed to turn inward to discover why I ran to the safety of the

stage in the first place. Some people need solitude. Some need the support of their friends and family. I had a hard time just *being* and felt more comfortable *doing*, so I explored other means of making a living. I began to study life-coaching. I founded, and still manage, a construction company. I have an organizing company. I took real estate investment courses, remodeled three homes, and moved four times in five years. I wasn't at peace, and I certainly wasn't content, but I was sufficiently exhausted with no time to feel.

Other Pathways, New Inspiration

During my studies, a colleague kept pushing me to teach. Finally, after much protest on my part, four years ago I began teaching university students to navigate the acting and vocal waters. In the process I discovered I am a natural teacher and always have been. I just never knew it.

Ironically, my teaching brought back

the joy of performance. As I watched my students get excited about voice or get rid of stage fright, tiny bubbles of fun came to the surface. I hadn't felt that in ages. Finally, one day I decided to perform in a faculty recital. When I finished "Send in the Clowns," there was silence in the hall, until someone yelled "Brava!" Then the whole place erupted. I sat in silence and quietly realized I was going to sing again, but *only* on my terms. I felt once again my love of the stage and relished my level of skill. It didn't matter whether someone else got it or loved it—this was fun!

Returning to singing was a choice, no longer a need. I've created and performed a new cabaret, but whether I sing again or not, matters little. Ironically, my communication with my audience is much more powerful when I am thoroughly enjoying myself, in the moment.

"Where there is a way, a path, it is someone else's footsteps. Each of us has to find his own way." —Joseph Campbell

When I left singing, I felt like a trained monkey whose organ grinder unhooked his chain and said, "You're on your own, baby." Now I had to create my own tune. I was stymied. I explored many wonderful books and found fragments of truth that offered me comfort, but still the picture was not yet clear. (I've put together a list of the books most helpful to me, on my website, www.thefreedomcoach.com.)

One of my most helpful maps on this journey to myself has been life coaching. I thought becoming a life coach might be a pathway to develop my passion, as a positive catalyst for others. Instead the transformation had to happen within me first. I learned I had so many unmet needs. These needs controlled my life because they were unacknowledged and belittled, so I ran to the embrace of the stage to fill the hollow void in my soul.

Instead I found that there is no love on stage except your own love for serving the music, and the love you create with the team around you. What you get from an audience is adulation for a character you've created or for the façade you show them. They don't know you. They don't know what you look like in your p.j.'s, or when you're sick, dripping sweat, and performing anyway. They can't smell the ancient, moldy costumes (thank goodness) or know that you are choking on the dust of your own death scene.

Our needs lurk until we acknowledge them, until we drag them out into the sunshine and give them some air and attention. (Check out the "Needless Program" on my website and see what it reveals for you.)

Remember, needs and wants are two different things. Often, when a need seems ridiculous to us, or we think, "That's not me," we must pay special attention. And yes, as you meet your needs they evolve and lessen, and you become whole.

If you're stuck trying to determine what your real needs are, instead of asking what you truly want or need, ask yourself, "What

don't I want?" "What *don't* I need?" and making the list gets easier. Take that list and transform it into a list of positives. Take, for example, "I'll never be hungry again" (of course, you must be framed against a flaming sunset sky and lift Tara's red earth to the heavens for this to work). Turn it into, "I enjoy a prosperous and abundant life." Now you have the groundwork of your own mission statement, of a truer vision for yourself, a vision that doesn't depend on a business, or a high note, to affirm your worth.

"The only cure for singing is more singing."
—Ella Fitzgerald

The miracle of your new vision is that singing may still play a vital role, but its color may have to change. It may evolve into a passion to serve, to transform others, to heal, to open hearts. Don't let a heartless business rob you of your joy. Sing to children. Sing for yourself, for love.

Don't let the process of study, auditioning, or rejections, shape your self-worth. I have seen countless singers robbed of spontaneity and happiness when they come to a university and are taught that classical song is sacred and unreachable. The unspoken message is, "You'll never be good enough." How sad. If you come to this business to fulfill needs (I certainly did) they've got you by the throat and you're set up for heartbreak.



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* Operas subject to change

Instead, sing because you can. *Sing because you love to sing, not to get love.* Sing to please yourself. Pleasing others is a habit we develop when we are very young, so we learn to give away our power to get love. Uncover your deepest needs and make sure they are satisfied. If your heart cries, "But singing is my deepest need," I ask you, "What do you get out of the singing?" That, and not the song, is your need revealed. When we don't put ourselves first on the list, we resent those around us who are unable to fulfill us. In our pain, we forget that it's not their responsibility to make us happy, it's ours.

Your replies to our survey are enlightening and your honesty touches my heart. We are a special breed, those of us who sing whether at La Scala or in the shower. We are the troubadours who translate our world, in all its pain and in all its beauty. We are shining, beautiful beings. Let no one dim the radiance of our souls. Talk with you next month.

Adria Firestone is an award-winning singer and actress whose credits range from Carmen to Family Guy. After an international singing career, she withdrew from the spotlight to explore another calling. For the past 15 years, Adria has given masterclasses throughout the world and is currently on the faculty at New Jersey City University. She is a speaker, writer, and life coach focusing on the international performing arts community. For more information, visit www.thefreedomcoach.com.

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