

**Samples taken from *Finding My Voice* by Jonathan Veira, published by Monarch Publishing, March 2012. Available in bookstores worldwide and online.**

**Background to the book:** Jonathan Veira is a much-loved star of the world of opera, he appears regularly at Glyndebourne and other top operatic venues, and has made many successful recordings with Elevation and other labels.

[Link to book reviews at Amazon.co.uk](#)

### **Sample 1 from chapter Three, *Learning The Ropes***

When you are someone like Mariah Carey and you turn up to perform at the O2 Arena or even Strictly Come Dancing, you get what is known in the music business as a rider. A rider consists of little comforts requested by the world weary entertainer to make them feel at home, loved, cared for, appreciated. Welcome gifts if you will. Mariah Carey's rider may have requests like,

'Miss Mariah Carey requests only white tulips and eight Jo Malone Pomegranate Noir candles in her dressing room. She must have two packets of Skittles in a silver bowl with all the blue ones removed. Oh and a three-month old Chihuahua in a pen for the interval please.'

### **Sample 2 from Chapter Five, *A Whole New World***

The only way to win any popular, fiercely competitive competition is to put your butterflies in a box, walk through the door like you own it, and face the judges down. I don't mean you should stand and glare at them, but you have to face them with the confidence to believe you should be there, and the courage to perform at your best. The world of classical music is daunting enough, without standing opposite people who eat and

drink opera and song repertoire for breakfast, waiting to eat you up for desert.

As with all good competitions, there is a lot of waiting around on hard chairs, sizing up the competition. It's not the most relaxing environment. Now you are not just waiting in any hall, you are anticipating your moment in front of the judges at the Grand Hall, Royal Academy of Music, Britain's oldest degree-granting music school. The Academy was granted a Royal Charter by King George IV in 1830. All that history staring down impassively at you from those esteemed walls.

I have made it a rule never to listen to anyone else's performance when I have to compete against them. It is not a decision rooted in arrogance, more protection from the voice that wants to point out how much better they are than me. If you can't kill the voice off, at least isolate it, working on the premise that fires cannot burn without oxygen. Three women, one man, the only thing I could think to say was,

'May the best man win!'

Brilliant Veira, foot in mouth right there. Then it was my turn and time turned hyper again until another voice, louder than the one in my head announced my name,

'The winner is Jonathan Veira!'

Sorry who? I thought they were talking about someone else. Then there were smiles, a big cheque, lots of photographs and hugging. I had gone from being Daddy Day-Care, part-time musician to,

'A young, promising baritone. The voice of the future.'

#### **Sample 4 from Chapter Six, *After The Flood***

The night of the Royal Gala I had some unexpected visitors. I sat with three or four others, getting dressed and putting on my make-up, making final preparations about an hour before the show. Then into the room walked two rather large men, both about 6' 3" and heavily built. They came across to me directly. They were men of few words but very forceful ones. They said, in a slight south London brogue and with a level of menace that can only be described as, well, 'menacing',

'We saw what you did the other night, going and sitting on somebody's lap and we STRONGLY suggest, and we do mean STRONGLY, that you don't even think about that with Her Royal Highness or else...'

They departed hastily, whereupon the helpful colleagues in my dressing room said, in a way that only singers can,

'Go on Jon – do it!'

Well, you can imagine. All I could think about then was avoiding Princess Diana. It must be made clear here that I cannot see on stage without glasses and I don't get on with contact lenses. (This is ever since one folded in my eye during Falstaff in '92 in Act One, Scene One and stayed there for all seventeen and a half minutes of the first scene!) So I thought,

'Avoid the tiaras! You'll be safe then.'

I ran on from the side for the beginning of my first aria and all I was thinking was,

'I can't go near Diana, I can't go near Diana, **don't** go near Diana.'

I sang the first verse. All went well. I could see a sparkling white dress on my left hand side. I assumed that was her royal personage, so made my way to the opposite side. I sat on the lap of a gentleman and made my approaches to the lady in the ball gown next to him. To my disquiet, I received absolutely zero response from her and indeed the audience – unlike previous performances.

I cut my losses and was making my way back to the stage when it suddenly occurred to me I hadn't looked at the gentleman on whose lap I had sat. I turned to look and realised that he was a familiar face. He was in fact the man who had handed me my degree certificate at the Royal Albert Hall in 1982. It was the Duke of Kent. I had sat on the lap of the Duke of Kent! Was I completely bonkers?

#### **Sample 4 from Chapter Ten, *The Final Curtain***

In 2012, IKEA plans to open its very first store in Croatia. All I can say is *all the very best* to everyone in Croatia, you have my deepest sympathy. How, I wonder, did first time buyers, students and middle class people after a bargain ever manage to survive before the birth of IKEA? We go once every ten years to buy an extension plug, except you always end up

with three (because you never know when you might need another one). Plus a generic picture, a pot plant and a rug that doesn't really belong anywhere but looks like a good deal at the time.

Oh, the psychology of IKEA! What doctor of the retail mind dreamed up those perfectly constructed rooms and the arrows (I believe IKEA management call it their Customer Guidance System – they are arrows for goodness sake!) that lead you like a sheepskin rug to the slaughter all the way to the checkout? There a smiling attendant gives you the bill for your soothing retail experience.

'That will be £514.73 please.'

What?! But we only came in for a packet of tealights and a set of plastic cups!

IKEA is made for obedient people. For this very reason I like nothing better than to subvert the carefully laid out floor plan by squeezing my ample body through a tiny space between Bathroom and Office, heading straight for the Swedish meatballs. Those Swedish meatballs are IKEA's secret draw card; you can even get them in Singapore, it's a fact. Swedish meatballs, an oddly tasty purple coloured sauce and mash all for £2.49 in UK money.

The meatballs are IKEA's way of fortifying you for the time when you realise that the table and chairs, bookshelves and entire kitchen that you have just seen so beautifully constructed in room after room with soft lights and not an Allen key to be seen, will NOT magically appear, pre-made in your home. Your new furniture will instead arrive flat, in cardboard boxes, with the dreaded words FLAT PACK emblazoned in accusing letters on each and every side. You will manfully open the boxes, pull out the Idiot Proof Instructions ('Should take less than two hours to construct') and more Allen keys than anyone should ever own.

You will battle plywood and metal for two and a half days. Then you will realise that you have three screws left over and your bookshelf will collapse. Then you will weep. You will be left wanting nothing more than to pack a suitcase and make your home in one of IKEA's beautifully constructed bedrooms. Or is that just me?