

The Lyric Diction Workbook Series

Book review by Debra Greschner from the Sept/Oct 2005 issue of *Journal of Singing*

The use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has become standard in the study of diction for singing. Almost every lyric diction textbook relies upon this uniform set of symbols. Not all textbooks, however, provide worksheets. Cheri Montgomery fills the gap with this set of diction workbooks. In her preface to each book, she emphasizes that the series is not intended to replace standard diction texts; instead, the workbooks offer an avenue for students to apply textbook rules for pronunciation and transcription. Each workbook begins with an IPA pronunciation listing of the sounds that occur in the language. Charts classifying the vowels and consonants in regard to both quality and articulation, are included in the introductory chapter as well. For each of the topics-ranging from specific vowels to diphthongs-there are enunciation exercises, rules for transcription, and several worksheets. Reviews and practice quizzes are interspersed among the chapters, and a summarizing "Review of Rules" appears at the end of each workbook.

The English workbook is designed to serve as an introduction to the International Phonetic Alphabet through the use of words that occur frequently in the English art song literature. Similarly, the French, German, and Italian workbooks provide a graded method of phonetic transcription using words drawn from art songs in those particular languages. All of the words or phrases used in exercises are translated into English. In this way, the workbooks not only facilitate correct pronunciation, but comprehension as well.

The workbooks correspond to the commonly used textbooks. The English workbook is based on the rules outlined in *The Singer's Manual of English*

Diction by Madeleine Marshall. (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1953). The bibliography for the Italian workbook cites *Singer's Italian* by Evelina Colorni (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1970), and that of the French and German workbooks refer to *The Singer's Manual of German and French Diction* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1970), *German for Singers* by William Odom and Benno Scholoum (Belmont, CA: Thomas Learning, 1997), and *Singing in French* by Thomas Grubb.

Montgomery tailors the format of each book to the special considerations of the language. The English workbook has units devoted to diphthongs and triphthongs, while the French workbook provides exercises in elision and liaison. The lyrics for the standard twenty-four songs and arias, as well as fourteen additional texts, are included for transcription practice in the Italian workbook. The German text includes twenty lieder texts for the same purpose. The German text also contains exercises in identifying and transcribing common prefixes and suffixes, inflectional endings, and compound words.

Three resources are available for each language: a student workbook, an answer key, and a correlated instructor's manual. The publisher also offers a class packet of a dozen answer keys at a substantially reduced price. These could be used for alternate lesson plans, such as student grading or board work. The French and German workbooks are priced slightly higher because they are considerably longer than the English and Italian workbooks.

The workbooks are an indispensable resource for diction classes. The series offers a consistent source of exercises that use words from the song repertoire, and the review of rules is a handy guide for reference. Both teachers and students alike will appreciate the clarity and the thoroughness of this series.