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Passion
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ISSUE 14

“As an opera singer you move a lot of breath freely through your body, making it a resonating chamber of power for sound and expression. As if defying gravity, it seems a deeper state of consciousness—of complete concentration and joy.”—Brenda Boozer



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Singing with Passion and Joy

An Interview with Brenda Boozer, Metropolitan Opera Soloist

BY LINDA EGENES

What skills does it take to become an opera star? Enormous discipline, acting ability, emotional stability, concentration, focus, and constant study of Italian, German, French, and Russian languages, to name a few. Not to mention a highly trained singing voice that can span three octaves and project over a 90-piece orchestra, reaching the back of a hall of 4,000 people without the use of a microphone.

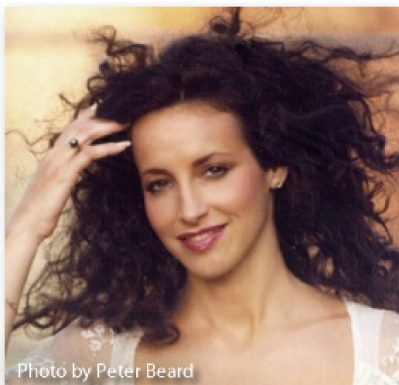


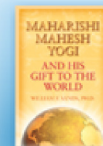
Photo by Peter Beard

In my first memory I was
four years old, jumping up

Brenda Boozer spent fourteen seasons as a soloist at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and has performed with the world's most prestigious opera companies, including the Paris Opera, Covent Garden in London, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, Teatro Comunale in Florence, Frankfurt Opera House in Germany, and the Houston Grand Opera.

As a dancer Boozer studied with Martha Graham, and as an actress she studied with Katharine Hepburn and Herbert Berghof of the Actors Studio. She has performed on the *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, *Late Night with David Letterman* and ABC's *Wide World of Entertainment*.

Currently, she sings, performs, and teaches voice to private students in New York City, Westchester, and Boone, NC. With her husband the pianist, composer, and organist Ford Lallerstedt, she has appeared in 150 recitals throughout the



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I know from my experience in

and down on a mattress singing “Johnny Appleseed” from the bottom of my heart to the top of my lungs. It was a feeling of unboundedness. I felt like I could fly.

country.

Here, Brenda Booser speaks about transcendence in music and meditation.

Enlightenment: How did you get interested in opera?

Brenda Booser: I would say opera got interested in me. I was born with a unique voice. It was a gift. At the age of five, my grandmother heard me singing to my dolls, and said that I would be an opera singer when I grew up. At ten years old I was in a production of “Amahl and the Night Visitors” by Menotti. At the age of fifteen, when my voice had matured, I began formal vocal training.

Enlightenment: What formative experiences contributed to your development?

Brenda Booser: My mother always had classical music playing in our home. My mother and father both sang and had beautiful voices. My father liked sight-reading J. S. Bach chorales. My mother had sung at the Chautauqua Opera Festival in New York. We were always singing and harmonizing, whether washing dishes together or taking long trips in the car.

I learned discipline beginning at the age of five when I began formal ballet training. My mother taught dance, drama, and creative movement in her studio in our home, and I was surrounded by that profession. My father was an ordained Methodist minister and a professor of religion at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Like many southern families, the church was the center of our lives. I sang solos every Sunday in Sunday school from the age of seven. Therefore, music and spirit were the cornerstones of my upbringing.



Meditation heals the very core of your being and allows self-healing. Then you're coming from a healed, whole place of light. When you meditate twice a day, you start to feel that every area of your life changes in a beautiful way—there's more kindness, more patience, more love.

Enlightenment: You sing with such joy. What is your inner experience when you sing?

Brenda Booser: In my first memory I was four years old, jumping up and down on a mattress singing “Johnny Appleseed” from the bottom of my heart to the top of my lungs. It was a feeling of unboundedness. I felt like I could fly.

As an opera singer you move a lot of breath freely through your body, making it a resonating chamber of power for sound and expression. As if defying gravity, it seems a deeper state of consciousness—of complete concentration and joy. When you make that kind of sound without a microphone, it connects you deeply within like meditation. There is no dependency on any external energy or power. It is just you and your ability to draw all that is needed from within. It is an unbounded connection to nature and a natural power.

You are pronounced alive on your first inhale, and pronounced dead on your last exhale. Breath is your life force. A singer rides on the breath and gives her breath. You inhale, and with your exhale your life force fills your sound with the poetry of the words.

Enlightenment: What is one of the best things about being a mezzo-soprano?

Brenda Booser: *Mezzo* means “middle,” so as a mezzo-soprano you must sing quite high and low. That means you can perform female parts such as Carmen and also male parts that are written for your type of voice.

In 1979, after being a finalist in the National Metropolitan opera competition in New York City, I auditioned for Maestro James Levine and made my Metropolitan Opera debut as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*. One of my favorite roles is “Octavian,” a handsome young prince, in *Die Rosenkavalier*, which I also sang at the Metropolitan Opera. In the physical life of the character, you have to master male mannerisms and how a male walks, how he carries himself. It opens up an entirely new challenge and vocabulary for an actress.

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Enlightenment: When and how did you come to TM® practice?

Brenda Boozer: I have been a spiritual seeker all of my life. Having grown up in what my father called “an Anglo-Saxon, white Christian ghetto,” I knew that there must be something beyond the concept of only an external God. I began seeking and studying Vedic knowledge for 22 years. This study was preparing me for the profound experience that was to come.

While in Boone, North Carolina, I met the Dreben family. They introduced me to Maharishi and the TM technique and Maharishi’s book, *The Science of Being And Art of Living*. Three years ago I learned the Transcendental Meditation technique, realizing that Maharishi was the teacher and the TM program was the meditation for which I had been searching.



Music is an instrument of peace, an instrument of how we’re alike, not how we’re different. Opera is the ambassador of creating beautiful music to bring heaven to earth.

Enlightenment: How has the Transcendental Meditation technique affected your life?

Brenda Boozer: As a performer, you have to be steady, established. I went to Juilliard with many talented singers, but not all of us had careers. There is so much demand on performers. There has to be a spiritual grounding not to be affected by fashion or criticism. Only an inward journey could bring this steadiness.

TM practice helps with clarity of mind and a restful alertness which allows a creative intelligence. Each of us is given a life force. It is an enormous gift, as well as a responsibility. This embodiment carries our spirit as well as our transcendence.

Meditation heals the very core of your being and allows self-healing. Then you’re coming from a healed, whole place of light. When you meditate twice a day, you start to feel that every area of your life changes in a beautiful way—there’s more kindness, more patience, more love.

Enlightenment: What do you feel opera contributes to our culture?

Brenda Boozer: There is only one art form that combines drama, history, orchestra, lighting, costumes, the natural singing voice acoustically unenhanced, and singing in foreign

languages. It is a unique, historic, and great art form that is international.

I look at our beautiful world family, and music is something we have in common. Often I would perform in a foreign country where the cast included people from Russia, Germany, Italy, France, China, and Japan. We would come together as one voice to create a large work of art.

Music is an instrument of peace, an instrument of how we’re alike, not how we’re different. Opera is the ambassador of creating beautiful music to bring heaven to earth.

Enlightenment: Any words to leave us with?

Brenda Boozer: I feel that life becomes more profound as we grow older. There is a deeper sense of wisdom and infinity and gratitude. I want to give back and help others find their true, unique voice within. My advice is to transcend twice a day and support your local TM Center.

Linda Egenes is co-editor of Enlightenment: The Transcendental Meditation® Magazine. She is the author of five books, including Super Healthy Kids: A Parent’s Guide to Maharishi Ayurveda, co-authored with Kumuda Reddy, M.D.

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