

The Vocal Pitstop



The Vocal Pitstop

Keeping Your Voice on Track

Adam D. Rubin, M.D.

Contributing Author: Cristina Jackson-Menaldi, Ph.D.

Cover art and original illustrations: David Cascardo

Forewords by Melissa Errico & Ron Livingston

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Thanks to my entire family, but particularly my parents for supporting me all through my lifetime, particularly when I was the only one of their five children not to go straight into medical school. They never missed a show through my college or professional acting career. My dad was my greatest supporter (and greatest critic). He was a great physician, and I know he would be proud of me for this book and other endeavors. He often reminded me to make sure that I thank him when I received an Oscar or Tony award. That is unlikely to happen at this point, but I am sure this will do.

Lastly, I would like to thank our patients, who give us the privilege of caring for their precious instruments.

*To my wife, Rebecca, and two kids, Whitney and
Noah, for their constant love and support, and for
letting me sing around the house . . . usually.*

Foreword

by Melissa Errico

I wish I had read a book like this when I was starting out. Let me back up a little and tell you that I met Dr. Adam Rubin when we were undergraduate students at Yale University and a part of a community of peers that sang and did theater, concerts, cabarets, and acapella harmony groups at every available moment between our other regular studies. To me, he was a singer. We all went on to professional lives in the theater (including Adam!) and eventually I heard he had become a successful throat doctor. How cool, I thought! It is a pleasure to write this foreword for an old friend who loves and knows about music and performance, and who is also now a part of the medical side of the voice.

I've learned a lot about the voice over the years. I started my professional career at age 18 in the First National Tour of *Les Misérables* playing the role of Cosette (in fact, I dropped out of my freshman year at Yale to do this, and returned three semesters later). That was an interesting beginning and perhaps could be something of a cautionary tale in retrospect. When you are on the road, everyone in the cast thinks they are a throat doctor and expert. This is probably true of any group of actors in a show, talking freely backstage about this or that health condition. I remember people 'curing' each other of colds with herbal remedy suggestions (often bad ideas), travel steamers (good), Advil for hoarseness (not good at ALL), Mucinex (fine, but if you don't drink enough water, not great), etc., etc. Some people warmed up. Some people did not. Some people partied and drank each night. Some were very disciplined. I was so young and extremely conscientious. I remember loving the show, being amazed by the gorgeous music, adoring the character of Cosette – and finding the lifestyle of professional performing somewhat lonely. I also realized how confusing it was to wade through all the unofficial 'advice' from my fellow actors. Eight shows a week takes

so much focus, and so much maintenance of sleep and food. I managed the singing requirements of *Cosette*, leaning on several years of good vocal training and probably a good deal of natural intuition (not to mention youth!). I found it very hard to unwind at night after each show. There was so much excitement in the experience, but then so much importance placed on rest and recovery, sometimes made harder by traveling and setting up temporary homes. I never knew when to eat dinner and I ate after the shows. (I hadn't heard of reflux YET.) I gained a ton of weight until we arrived in Detroit and I signed up for a local diet center and learned about eating protein, regular meals, and plenty of vegetables. As well as slimming down to my very best, I noticed a big change in my energy and my sense of confidence. By the time I returned to college, I had much better habits than the average pizza-at-midnight student.

As time went on, I did many Broadway musicals. I cannot go into all the lessons learned, but I do recall my second Broadway show playing Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* at the age of 22. That was a role that suited my voice perfectly – as I had always had an easy middle voice with a lot of power (good for the urchin) and was a romantic soprano (wishfully) modeled on the sweet feel of Julie Andrews. But, one day, before we opened, I was asked to go to a sound studio to record screaming. The director's concept had a nightmarish element where the audience hears the poor scared Eliza screaming wildly off stage, frightened of what is happening, afraid to become naked to take a bath, terrified overall of Higgins' experiment. So, without complaint, I went to the studio after a full day of work and screamed for over ten minutes, giving the sound engineer lots of choices. The next morning, I was hoarse and I knew something was wrong. I had a vocal hemorrhage. Eventually, it was surgically repaired. Needless to say, I learned that there are certain extreme requests that we as singers sometimes shouldn't fulfil. Yes, I wish I hadn't screamed. But in the end, I relied on good medical care and pulled through. When it opened, the *New York*

Times said ‘Newcomer Melissa Errico is beguiling’. I was grateful to be singing and healthy again and not too worried about being beguiling, though that was nice to hear!

Reading *The Vocal Pitstop*, I was struck by the way we learn things. We *should* actually have a plan, and not go about the process guessing. When we are very young, we don’t know exactly who could teach the whole picture – the actual singing of music, finding a connection to songs and characters (an emotional journey in itself), as well as the medical and health aspects. I had voice lessons growing up, but the nature of being a teenager is a lot of flux, travel, going to college, and it is hard to get any consistency. During *My Fair Lady*, I found a voice teacher in New York City who I have stayed with until this very day. I go every Wednesday at 1 PM. And have for 20 years. In my 20s, I married Patrick McEnroe, a professional tennis player. I was struck by how similar his life was to mine. We are both athletes. Singing is like sports and setbacks are a natural part of it all. Injuries do happen, for whatever reason, and we address them and heal. Now, I am a mother to three young daughters, and new challenges exist (and new inspiration for sure!). I juggle motherhood with my love of theater and singing. I have made records, done more musicals, plays and TV, and enjoy touring with symphonies in concert. I am mindful to get enough sleep, not to talk too loud with three boisterous kids, to do yoga and stay fit.

Little details have become a part of my discipline. The importance of warming up, of course, but we also must *cool down* our voices. It’s very hard to do, but we cannot chat with the audience after the show, or go out socializing with all the beloved guests and family who come to see performances. In the book you are about to read, you will read about the voice on a very practical level – how it works, how to protect it, and how to approach a professional career. Especially for singers just starting out, I think this book is invaluable. For anyone who needs their

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voices strong and free, which really is everyone, there is something to learn here.

Enjoy those voices. Your voice. Stay healthy and stay calm.

Thank you Dr. Adam Rubin for using your voice to support all those who will benefit from your writing. I know I'll keep a copy in my own dressing room.

Foreword

by Ron Livingston

Wow! Adam Rubin has written the definitive owner's manual for the professional voice. With pictures.

When I first met Adam at Yale in the late 80s, he was an actor, director, and baritone for the acappella Society of Orpheus and Bacchus. Together, we studied voice work, scene beats, and how to be present, honest, and compelling on stage. He directed me in class as one of history's more unlikely Stanley Kowalskis, and a year later was truly magnificent playing Lopakhin in my thesis production of *The Cherry Orchard*. Adam Rubin was the consummate dedicated performer.

Then we graduated and I heard conflicting reports that he was either working off-Broadway, touring in *Oklahoma!*, or going to Harvard Medical School. Turns out they were all true.

With *Vocal Pitstop*, Adam – sorry, make that Dr. Adam D. Rubin, M.D. – has now drawn upon his unique perspective as an actor, singer, and leading laryngologist to create an *indispensable* guide for anyone who relies on their voice to make a living. It should be required reading in any conservatory or communications program, and I selfishly wish he'd written it twenty-five years ago. Except then I'd have missed out on one hell of a Lopakhin. So let's just say I'm very, very grateful to have it now.



Preface

As a laryngologist who was a former working actor and singer, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to write this book. When I was in high school, college, and acting professionally, like many other performers, I had little knowledge about how to recognize, avoid, evaluate, and manage vocal injuries. I blindly used homeopathic remedies that another performer, singing teacher, or even physician might have suggested without really knowing the nature of my injury or cause of my hoarseness. I still remember loading up on aspirin during a run of a show, because one of my coworkers told me it would reduce inflammation to the vocal folds. He failed to mention it would increase my risk for vocal fold hemorrhage. In high school, I played Horace Vandergelder in *Hello, Dolly!* I was becoming progressively hoarser through using a ‘character voice’ to sound older. I had essentially no voice by opening night. Believe it or not, a doctor told me to gargle with Jack Daniels and terpin hydrate with codeine. I have no idea how he convinced my father, an excellent physician, to follow those instructions. I feel very fortunate that that was not the end of my singing career right there and then.

I, like others, often lived in denial or assumed my hoarseness would resolve with time. On the other hand, I also lived in fear that my voice would not be in prime shape when called upon to perform. I had never heard of videostroboscopy, let alone knew who out there in the medical profession specialized in professional voice care or what made for an appropriate evaluation of the voice. This is a desperately needed book for the performer to have and even carry with them to auditions, on tours, backstage, or to the doctor’s office. But it is not only for the high-end performer; it will help anyone who values or depends on a healthy voice for their livelihood or happiness. This handbook is a fairly concise reference explaining in fairly simple terms how the voice works, what can go wrong, how to avoid serious career-threatening

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injury, where to seek help, how to stay working when things are not perfect, and when it is necessary to shut things down. In a sense, this book is a chance to share with others my own 'if I only knew then what I know now'. I hope you enjoy it.

Adam D. Rubin, M.D.
www.lakeshoreent.com
[@VoiceDocintheD](https://twitter.com/VoiceDocintheD)

Introduction

Why do I need this book?

'I thought it was my allergies.' 'I thought my laryngitis would get better in a couple of days.' 'I knew I was hoarse, but I was still able to perform reasonably well.' These are all variations on themes commonly heard from patients who suffer a voice change, but wait longer than they should to be appropriately evaluated. Perhaps they finally come in when they realize their upper range has not returned in months; or they cannot get through the day teaching without losing the voice. The delay may be due to denial, or, more likely, to not realizing that voice change may be the sign of something more serious.

The voice is a precious and delicate instrument. It is one of our most effective, if not our most accessible, means of communicating and expressing ourselves. We use it on a daily basis, and yet often take it for granted, thinking it will always be there when we need it. Many consider some degree of hoarseness as expected or acceptable. Fortunately, most vocal injuries will resolve themselves given our bodies' ability to heal. However, this is not always the case. A delay in identifying the problem and providing appropriate treatment can prevent normal voice recovery and leave someone significantly impaired. Anyone who has lost his or her voice for a significant period of time knows how difficult life can be without it. Maybe it interferes with your social life, your family, or your sense of self. Maybe it interferes with your livelihood. Maybe it is a sign of a major medical problem, even cancer.

Prevention of vocal injury is tantamount to the performer, as he or she might be called upon at any moment and must be in optimal voice. An audition may come through; a last minute gig may be offered; a chance to sing a solo in the high school choir may present itself; a big-time reviewer might be coming to see an evening performance after a brilliant all-out performance in the matinee earlier that day;

a stadium might be sold out awaiting the show. But, the singer or actor is not the only professional dependent on a healthy voice.

What about the teacher working 8-hour days, 5 days a week, then needing to go through parent conferences; the priest or rabbi leading a congregation for the third service of the day; the lawyer making closing arguments to the jury; the doctor talking to patients throughout the day; the soccer coach trying to manage his team; the assembly line leader needing to bellow orders over a noisy environment. Other professions might not demand the same level of vocal quality as the singer, but still demand a serviceable voice that is sustainable. As voice specialists, we see such people almost daily who are concerned they are losing their ability to perform their job.

Although most singers and performers have a keen awareness of their vocal quality and demands, many of them still take the voice for granted. Many acknowledge the importance of training and technique, but still others go on god-given talent, assuming that the voice will always be present in top shape when needed. Even among well-trained performers, few truly understand exactly what makes and keeps the voice working. In addition, when the voice is not all together present, when range is lost or the tone has changed, many will just accept that they have 'laryngitis' without recognizing that a more significant problem may be present.

Some vocal injuries, if not recognized and treated immediately, can have serious career-threatening long-term effects. On the other hand, any performer will likely run into some hoarseness at various points during a run. When should you let an understudy go on? When should you go on voice rest? When should you be seen by a physician? Whom should you see? What can you do to avoid missing work?

Career longevity depends on a healthy voice for many people. The informed voice user should be best prepared to stay healthy, recognize vocal injury, and seek the appropriate attention needed. It would be

great to have a quick reference to help prevent and recognize injuries, and help decide what steps should be taken if voice quality changes. A ‘pitstop’, if you will, for voice maintenance.

The goal of *The Vocal Pitstop* is to provide a source of information that will help the serious (or not quite so serious) voice user enjoy his or her full vocal potential. Years of research have been devoted to explaining the complexity of the human voice. Numerous theories, mathematical equations, and principles of physics contribute to this understanding. This book will speak of none of them. Rather, it will help you keep your voice in the best shape possible; to recognize voice problems; and to know what to do should problems arise. I have even included a flowchart at the back of the book for a quick guide on what to do and where to turn when things go wrong. It will refer you to the appropriate chapter in the book for more details – but do also read the whole book for continuity.

The book is not a substitute for investing in vocal training and working on technique, but will provide you with numerous tips and exercises to help strengthen, preserve, and recover the voice. It is meant for the high-end singer, the young high school performer, the teacher, the coach, and almost anyone else who loves to use his or her voice or depends on it financially. Regardless of what you do, you will likely find usefulness in this book – unless, of course, you are a mime artist.

When a Formula 1 driver feels his car is not operating at full potential he pulls in for a pitstop. When your voice is not functioning at its full potential, you need a vocal pitstop. This book is meant to be that ‘pitstop’ – to help you:

- understand how your voice works
- recognize when a problem arises
- identify what might be wrong
- be aware of when it is time to bring it in to a ‘garage’ for service
- know who should provide that service and with what tools

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- learn how to keep it going when you are low on gas
- know when you need to stop and turn the engine off.

Do not let your motor fail! Do not blow a gasket! Stop in for routine maintenance and keep your voice running smoothly.

It is up to you to know when and from whom to seek attention. It is up to you to recognize who is best prepared to evaluate and treat you. Are they a voice specialist, e.g. a laryngologist or voice pathologist? Do they work as a 'voice team' at a 'voice center'? Do they have the tools to adequately evaluate you? *The Vocal Pitstop* will prompt you on when and where to turn to put you on the road to voice recovery, maintenance, and longevity. Keep it by your side – make it easy to stop in regularly for a Vocal Pitstop.

Author biographies

Adam D. Rubin, M.D.



Adam Rubin has had a life-long passion for the human voice. Before attending medical school, he was a professional actor and singer, performing in musicals and plays at off-Broadway and regional theaters, as well as in a national tour. He was a member of the Actors Equity Association, Screen Actors Guild, and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. He is also a violinist and has dabbled in song writing.

Currently a laryngologist and Director of the Lakeshore Professional Voice Center in St. Clair Shores, Michigan, he graduated *summa cum laude* from Yale College with degrees in Theater Studies and Economics. He received his medical doctorate from Harvard Medical School. Following his residency in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Michigan, he completed a fellowship in Laryngology and Care of the Professional Voice under the direction of Robert T. Sataloff, M.D., D.M.A., at the American Institute for Voice and Ear Research.

In addition to his clinical and artistic expertise, Dr. Rubin is active in voice research. He has written many book chapters and numerous scientific articles published in major otolaryngology journals. He is a frequent presenter at national and international meetings. He is a member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology, American Laryngological Association, Triological Society, and the Michigan Otolaryngology Society. He has academic appointments at the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine. One of his biggest joys is hosting an annual World Voice Day concert every April, in which he and many of his patients sing and celebrate voice recovery. Most importantly, he is a loving husband and father of two wonderful children.

Maria Cristina A. Jackson-Menaldi, Ph.D.



Dr. Jackson-Menaldi has worked as a voice pathologist and singing voice specialist for over 40 years. She and Dr. Daniel Megler created the Lakeshore Professional Voice Center in 1991, which she has co-directed with Dr. Adam Rubin for the last ten years. She is an adjunct professor at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, MI. She holds master degrees in speech language pathology, audiology, and choir directing from the University of Museo Social Argentino, Buenos Aires,

Argentina; solfeggio and piano from the National Music Conservatory of Buenos Aires; and a post-doctoral degree in general phonetics from the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris France. She has worked as a professor at the University of Salvador, Museo Social Argentino, University of Buenos Aires, the National Music Conservatory, and Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, as well as the Music Conservatory and the University of the Sorbonne, in Paris, France. She also has worked internationally as a choir director and in-house voice pathologist for opera houses and music conservatories. She continues to lecture internationally.

Dr. Jackson-Menaldi has written numerous scientific articles and book chapters. She has written the books *La Voz Patologia* and *La Voz Normal*, published by Editorial Medica, Panamericana. She is a well-known leader in the professional voice community.

Daniel Cascardo



Challenging the viewer to be inspired and use his imagination is the goal of Daniel Cascardo, a nationally recognized visual artist and Michigan native. His approach to art is to interpret life in a very positive and thought provoking manner through the use of uninhibited brush strokes, bright colors, patterns, symbols, and various forms of nature – including fantastic birds and fish – that let your imagination soar.

Currently a resident of Royal Oak, Mich., Cascardo maintains a private studio and travels to a variety of locations to work with schools, corporations, and other organizations to engage individuals in team building experiences through the use of art. Among the honors Cascardo has received, he won the Starbucks Artist Recognition Award in 2006 for a mural that was created for the speciality coffee retailer's Michigan Avenue store in west Dearborn, Mich. Cascardo was awarded the Mayors Arts Award for his art in 2011. He was part of a national promotional campaign for True Religion Fragrances sold in Macy department stores across the country. He recently received the peoples choice award for a POP up gallery in Dearborn, Michigan.

Cascardo works in a variety of media including canvas, wood, glass, and textiles. He showcases his personal style and examples of work in different art media on his website, www.danielcascardo.com. Upbeat rhythmic music, color photos, video clips, a gallery, shop, and blog are all used to create an interactive experience for online visitors as well as to help them be entertained and to gain a feeling and appreciation for Cascardo's free flowing, abstract style.

His website includes an online shop to purchase prints, t-shirts, and other items that appeal to people who like his work and have a more limited budget. Cascardo enjoys hearing from visitors who visit his website and learn how his art can be applied to their lives.

Melissa Errico



Tony-Award Nominee Melissa Errico is a Broadway force whose talents span the stage, music, and the screen.

Praised by critics and audiences alike, the *New York Times* proclaimed Errico ‘The Voice of Enchantment’ with her performances described as ‘commanding’, ‘incandescent’, and ‘beguiling and enigmatic’. She most recently completed her run as Clara in the highly-acclaimed 2013 Classic Theater Company revival of *Passion* by Stephen Sondheim,

earning her sixth Drama Desk Award nomination. She also appeared in the lauded *Kurt Weill on Broadway*, reprising her work as Venus in celebration of the release of the first-ever recording of ‘One Touch of Venus’.

Influenced by the great Dames of the stage, Errico interrupted her studies at Yale to accept the iconic role of Cosette in the first national touring company of *Les Misérables*. After returning and completing her degree, she debuted on Broadway in *Anna Karenina*, later singing the eponymous role on the 2007 cast album. Her Broadway credits include the revival of *My Fair Lady*, in which she played Eliza Doolittle, *High Society*, *Amour* (Tony nomination for Best Leading Actress in a Musical), *Dracula, the Musical* and *White Christmas*. In 2004, she starred in the wildly successful off-Broadway production of *Finian’s Rainbow*, winning an array of awards, and made an acclaimed recording of that show. Melissa has also earned Drama Desk Award nominations for each of her starring roles in non-musical roles in such great plays as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Major Barbara*, and *Candida*. She has also starred in Wally Shawn’s *Aunt Dan and Lemon* with Lili Taylor and in the US premier of *Gift of the Gorgon* opposite Alec Baldwin. She was selected by Stephen Sondheim to star in *Sunday in The Park With George* at The Kennedy Center.

Errico’s command of both the small and silver screen is evident with roles on *The Good Wife*, *Law and Order*, *Blue Bloods*, *Central Park West*, and others. She has also appeared

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opposite film stars Angelina Jolie in *Life or Something Like It*, Dennis Quaid in *Frequency*, and Kyra Sedgewick in *Loverboy*, directed by Kevin Bacon.

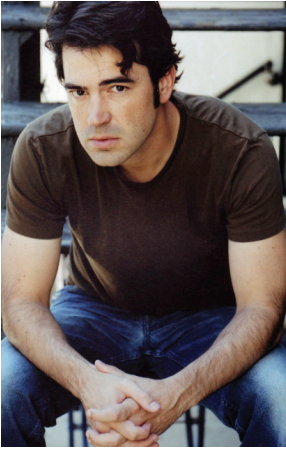
Proving her vocal talents transcend the stage, Errico has released several albums to date; most recently collaborating with noted film/jazz/pop composer Michel Legrand and legendary producer Phil Ramone on *Legrand Affair*. Her experience surrounding the project inspired her published essay entitled 'Musing'. Her debut solo album *Blue Like That* produced by industry legend Arif Mardin, and follow up album *Lullabies and Wildflowers*, also garnered critical acclaim.

Errico has an extensive concert history including appearances at The Rose Auditorium Lincoln Center, Dizzy's Jazz Club, The Cafe Carlyle, Joe's Pub, The Kennedy Center, and Avery Fisher Hall, and throughout the country with esteemed symphonies such as the National Symphony Orchestra and The Cleveland Orchestra. In 2008, she made a successful London concert debut at the Palladium with Angela Lansbury and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Melissa Errico lives in Manhattan with her husband Patrick McEnroe and their three daughters.

She is currently shooting the new Cinemax series *The Knick* starring Clive Owen, directed and produced by Stephen Soderbergh, which airs in 2014.

Ron Livingston



Ron Livingston is a professional actor and once-in-a-while singer, best known for projects like *Swingers*, *Office Space*, *Band of Brothers*, *Sex and the City*, and *Boardwalk Empire*. He most recently appeared as Elvis Presley in a performance that required dusting off a high B-natural. Ron lives in Los Angeles, California with his wife Rosemarie and daughter Gracie.