

# Review by NBD-Biblion March 2008

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Walter Roozendaal performs as a storyteller with his accordion, plays in a klezmer trio, gives workshops for choirs, and works as a theatre teacher. He draws on all these skills in this practical guide for singers (soloists or choir members) and musicians. He addresses various facets of performance skills, such as the 'view', communicating with the audience, basic exercises in relaxation and 'grounding', coming on and going off stage, listening, acting/singing and making announcements. In a friendly tone of voice, the author goes into the psychological aspects of a presentation and gives practical exercises and tips, paying plenty of attention to the contact between performer and audience. It is a pity that the guide's design is rather plain and academic, with no photos or illustrations, apart from the odd explanatory sketch. With regard to content, however, this is an extremely useful publication for musicians who want to take a moment to improve their presentation on stage. Hardly anything else has been published on this subject in Dutch. It is highly recommended for singers, choir members and musicians, whether amateur or professional.

## Review in 'Vocaal'

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By Hilbrand Adema, choir consultant with the Netherlands organisation for amateur art 'Kunstfactor'.

Volume 121 number 4 July/August 2008

Magazine of the Koninklijke Christelijke Zangersbond (KCZB — Royal League of Christian Singers).

'A Guide to Performance Skills' is the title of the hundred-and-thirty-page book by Walter Roozendaal. It's a weighty title that suggests a certain comprehensiveness. Does Roozendaal live up to his pretensions?

The presentation of choirs has been a hot item over the past ten years, so you're always bumping into workshops, courses and other forms of training on this theme. In *Vocaal*, too, we regularly broached the subject of 'A feast for the eyes as well' – because that's what we're talking about here. However, it's been a while since a book was published on the subject, so I was looking forward to Walter Roozendaal's *Guide* with some curiosity.

Walter Roozendaal is a versatile and modest person, who gradually persists with what he sees as his mission: conveying his knowledge, skills and insights in the fields of directing, music and storytelling. His years of experience in these areas have made him into an enthusiastic and expert teacher. Like Roozendaal himself, his *Guide to Performance Skills* is clearly structured. Actually, everything revolves around his key concepts of general presence and communication. It should be clear that these concepts are closely linked. After all, a choir's presence is something that is communicated straight away ('they look such a mess when they come on stage'). But a subject like presence also offers the opportunity of communicating something other than messiness for once. And this is exactly what Roozendaal's book is about. He is immediately clear in his introduction that he doesn't

go into aspects like 'choreography and the addition of expressive moments'. What his thirteen chapters do deal with is mainly the principles of presentation.

Following a hilarious sketch of what it shouldn't look like (the introverted musician who doesn't know how to take applause at the end of a wonderful concert, or the choir singers who are so focused on what their conductor's doing that they forget there's an audience as well), Roozendaal gets to what he sees as the key to the communication between musician and audience: letting the listeners move along inwardly with the music. His key concepts (in brief) are therefore continual communication between the performer and the audience, the way the audience moves along inwardly with the musician, and an open, relaxed and poised presence.

Roozendaal goes into more detail about these key concepts in the following chapters, especially in the extensive chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 is about 'The wide open view' of the performer, who opens himself wide up to the audience. Through some interesting exercises in this chapter (including the gate exercise), we come to the three basic exercises in chapter 3: Grounding, A free and responsive presence, and once again the Wide open view along with the Toothbrush-toothpaste exercise (to avoid misunderstandings, this is not about brushing your teeth, but about getting into the habit of appearing before your audience with this open view).

The rather technically demanding chapters 2 and 3 (I did the exercises before brushing my teeth for a whole week, and really came to understand what Roozendaal meant) are followed by some very practical chapters about Coming on stage (How should you walk? How do you avoid the familiar 'trickle' of applause when coming on with a choir?), Managing applause (a nice term that covers the meaning well; key concept: welcome your audience!), The real listener, and Leaving the stage (with some very interesting and concrete 'techniques' for exiting the stage successfully).

The book takes a detour in the chapter Excursion into acting. The key concept here is the question of '...how can I open people up to sing not just on the basis of music technique, but also with inner involvement?' In answering this, Roozendaal draws on his wide experience as a storyteller. Telling, Seeing and Being are the key concepts here. Telling is not as rich as Seeing, as the empathising stage is left out: '...if people can first empathise emotionally through your Seeing (the moment of opening up your listeners' perspectives through visualising something), they will immediately be much more open to the content of your text!'

The Guide to Performance Skills by Walter Roozendaal is a valuable book for conductors and choirs who want to focus on all aspects of their presentation; of far greater value than I can explain here. One criticism might be that it is actually too rich in exercises, suggestions and ideas. If choir singers or conductors can command just a quarter of what Roozendaal has to offer, they will already be well on their way. And Roozendaal's inspiring and intriguing teaching will do the rest.