

OPPORTUNITIES IN

Performing Arts Careers



VGM Opportunities Series

OPPORTUNITIES IN PERFORMING ARTS CAREERS

**Bonnie Bjorguine
Bekken**

Foreword by
Peter Hemmings
General Director
Los Angeles Opera



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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father, Odin M. Olson,
performing artist, beloved husband, cherished father,
idolized grandfather. Your grace belongs to the ages.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bonnie Bekken has been the editor of *Career World* and *Writing!* magazines, has taught in elementary and junior high schools, and currently is senior editor, specializing in guidance and career development materials, for Social Studies School Service in Los Angeles. She has written career columns for national syndication and won several awards from the Educational Press Association of America for excellence in educational journalism. Bonnie has been listed in *Who's Who of American Women* since 1989.

With capabilities in voice and violin, her earliest career aspirations were directed to the performing arts in general and musical theater in particular. A corresponding love for language lead her instead to education and writing—and the music of words.

FOREWORD

When I left university I had a classical degree and some experience as a performer, but no specific training for a career as an arts administrator. I learned on the job, bolstered by a passion for opera and the theater. This kind of career advancement does not happen anymore. Today, there are university courses in every conceivable aspect of arts administration, and I have taught many of them. Now, as I retire, I flatter myself that I can detect in students the qualities necessary for success. These qualities are application, the ability to effectively deal with a range of personalities, financial acumen, flexibility combined with a bit of stubbornness, and, above all, passion.

The role of the arts in society today is a vital one. People have more leisure time and they demand entertainment and stimulation. Opera, dance, theater, and cinema are active in large and small communities alike, and they all require proper managing. When I left university, everyone assumed that I would become a teacher. For some time, I

avoided that career path, but now I find that I am a teacher and an educator—one who cultivates the talents that exist in young people. When I discover those who have drive and passion, I am encouraged about the future of the arts. *Opportunities in Performing Arts Careers* is an invaluable reference tool for just these types of people.

Peter Hemmings
General Director
Los Angeles Opera

PREFACE

I was told at an early age that I had talent: I performed, wrote poetry, made straight A's. I wanted to be an actress because I thought it would be fun. I would be rich and famous.

I quickly learned I was wrong. Acting was hard work, and talent wasn't enough. I took classes, joined a theater company, and earned a university degree in theater. Day in, day out, I studied. I performed—acting, dancing, “paying my dues.” As an actress, I had to face rejection: not getting the role. My ego, my self-esteem, was hurt. Many times I grew frustrated and wanted to quit, but I was stubborn, and something deep down kept me going.

I finally had to take a good look at myself after turning down a \$50,000-a-year job in public relations. Was I insane? Everyone else thought I was.

That's when I knew that the something deep inside me was love for what I did. I loved being who I was: a writer, a poet, a performing artist. So I set goals and was on my way.

I created a one-woman show, which is successful to this day; I started a film production company so I could write, direct, and produce my own projects. Love for what I do became my driving force—not fame, not money.

Today, as President of Hozhoni Productions, I bring Native American storytelling and art workshops into K–12 classrooms. This, along with my ongoing work as a consultant to studios, allows me to share knowledge with people who have decided to begin the climb up the mountain to become actors, writers, dancers, and musicians.

They will have to learn from their mistakes, as I did. They will have to learn to make peace with their pedestal, as I did. They will have to make their own journey, just as I did.

The path up the mountain is not easy, but perseverance and dedication will get you there. I wish you well on your journey. How you do it is up to you. Why you do it, where you will go—and when—all depend on that something deep inside that can keep you hanging on until you reach your goals.

Remember, if you can't make your dreams happen... who will?

Geraldine Keams
President of Hozhoni Productions

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Without the support and encouragement of Lawrence Alan, this book would not have been written.

I am indebted to Joyce Lain Kennedy, nationally syndicated careers columnist and forever friend, for her words of wisdom and for convincing me to take an assignment that proved to be vastly rewarding.

Special thanks go to Geraldine Keams, President of Hozhoni Productions. Both actress and educator, Ms. Keam's generosity of spirit and insightful contributions are cherished.

A debt of appreciation belongs to Dr. Kenneth B. Hoyt, distinguished professor at Kansas State University and former director of the United States Office of Career Education, for his comments and critique. I also wish to thank Dr. Darryl Laramore, author of *Careers* and coauthor, with Joyce Lain Kennedy, of *The Career Book*. Dr. Laramore is a leading light in guidance and career education—and one of the finest human beings I know.

Many have given their thoughts and their time. My thanks go to Denise Aguirre, Karen Mitchell, and Kay Roskam for their assistance in defining music therapy; Madelyn Berdes, my favorite “Phantom Dancer”; Mary Tokita and Michael Hackett, for their contributions to the UCLA Lab program and this book. The staffs and members of many associations in the arts deserve—and have—my appreciation for providing resources and suggestions. It is my wish that this book meet the expectations of all of you who assisted in its production, but, in the end, I hold the responsibility for its shortcomings. May you find them few.

INTRODUCTION

I feel the message of peace, the message of tolerance, the message of dialog, the message of nonviolence, is very crucial and urgent. And if various artists through their own professions promote human values, that is very important.... Singers singing songs reach a much larger audience [than I].

This observation on the power of musical performance was made by Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama of Tibet, before his appearance at the 1999 World Festival of Sacred Music in Los Angeles. The Dalai Lama called music “perhaps the most universal” of “the many forms in which human spirit has tried to express its innermost yearnings and perceptions.”

Whether your own career aspirations are for the theater, dance, or a form of musical performance, the Dalai Lama’s words hold true: the performing arts are a translation of life and a tribute to the endurance of the human spirit. But they are more; they *are* life. In live performance, the artist can touch the chords of human response in an audience. This

is a lofty realization, and one that carries a tremendous responsibility.

It's extraordinarily difficult to reach that plateau, to make a living in the performing arts. This book will show you what the possibilities are, if you have the talent and persistence to reach for them. Even if your performing artistry becomes an avocation rather than a source of livelihood, the Dalai Lama's message has merit.

Whatever your work, if it draws on the humanity in yourself and helps promote consideration and compassion in others, you have achieved the best of all possible things. You are a success.

Bonnie Bjorguine Bekken

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CHAPTER 1

**OPENING NIGHT:
MEDEA BY MOONLIGHT**

The moon shines bright: in such a night as this...
Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls,
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents...
In such a night Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
That did renew old Aeson.

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

You are backstage of the open-air Greek amphitheater. A moist sea breeze and a backdrop of sun-bleached mountains remind you that this Mediterranean climate is ideal for the evening's opening night performance of Euripides' *Medea*. Your pre-performance jitters give way to an adrenalin surge as you peer out at the gathering crowd.

This is a new venue for you. And the year is—not 431 B.C.—but 2002. You are not in ancient Athens, but in modern-day Pacific Palisades, California, USA. You are at