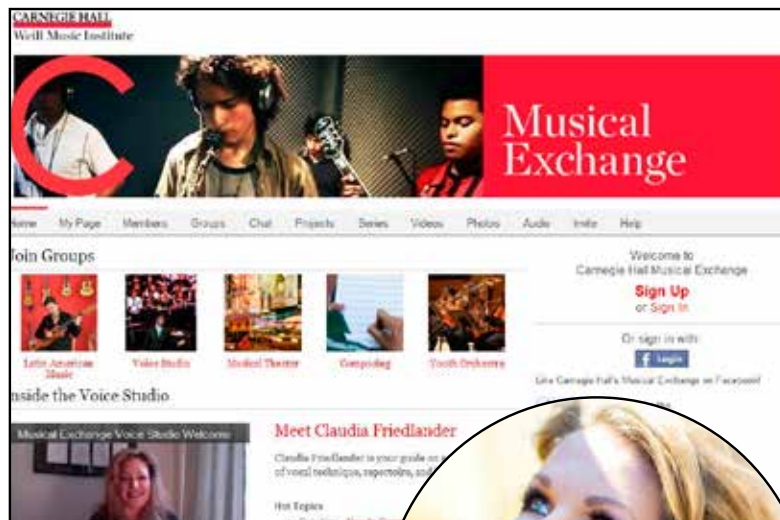


# Application Innovations:

*Carnegie Hall's Musical Exchange Seeks to Redeem a Stressful Process*

BY CLAUDIA FRIEDLANDER



Joyce DiDonato

*Read about a new and revolutionary application process for a series of masterclasses mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato will present as part of her Carnegie Hall Perspectives residency in 2014-2015. Singers will have the unique opportunity to get feedback on all aspects of their application—bio, headshot, repertoire choices, and more—before they submit the application.*

One of the most distracting, irritating, and time-consuming processes young singers engage in is the act of applying for the opportunities that will move their careers forward. Whether it is for a training program, a masterclass, or a mainstage audition, the work involved can be dizzying. Some companies accept MP3 files, others physical CDs, and still others insist on videos. Repertoire requirements can be highly specific and seldom overlap in an advantageous way. It's entirely possible that applying for four opportunities that require two audio selections each may necessitate recording eight pieces! Résumé tweaking is stress inducing, and everyone has a different opinion. Depending on whom you ask, serif fonts are essential, sans serif fonts are much cleaner, education should always feature prominently at the top, education should be relegated to the bottom, etc.

Worst of all, this process has a binary result: yes, we will hear you or advance you to the next round or no, we won't. When have you ever received feedback specifically about the quality of your

application materials from a company that refused to hear you? Even if there is a problem with the way you are presenting yourself that could be solved with ease, a rejection is more likely to result in the assumption that they didn't like your singing, whether or not that is actually the case.

In connection with the series of masterclasses that Joyce DiDonato will present during her Carnegie Hall Perspectives residency in the 2014–2015 season, Carnegie Hall will offer an online workshop on audition preparation throughout the summer and early fall in the hope of improving the application experience. The workshop will give potential applicants the opportunity to work through all the steps of the audition process with professional guidance, ask questions, and receive feedback on their materials before they are even submitted into consideration. The aim is to turn the audition process into a learning opportunity by providing resources to support young singers as they evaluate and apply for DiDonato's masterclasses or other educational and performance opportunities.

Carnegie Hall's interactive educational website, Musical Exchange, will serve as a hub for these activities. Conceived as a global online community for young musicians to connect with one another, share their musical performances, and participate in groups and projects led by professional artists, Musical Exchange provides an ideal infrastructure for this extended application preparation workshop.

According to Christopher Amos, director of education media and technology for Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute (WMI), the goal is "to create a set of educational, career-development resources that align with the opportunity to apply for Joyce's masterclasses next season. For each topic related to the audition process, we will also follow up with blog posts, multimedia resources, and online discussions that draw on the perspectives of professionals in the field and allow young artists to explore the topics in greater depth while connecting with a supportive community of peers and mentors."

Topics will include choosing appropriate educational and performance opportunities; creating a timeline for the application process; selecting audition repertoire; and preparing headshots, demos, bios, and other materials. Singers will be encouraged to participate in discussions and share the audition materials they're developing. DiDonato and members of the WMI staff will provide commentary and advice. Membership in Musical Exchange and advice on the preparation of materials will be free, but there will be a \$10 fee to submit a completed application for DiDonato's masterclasses, which is due by Oct. 15. It will be fascinating to see how this interactive process evolves on Musical Exchange and the impact it will have on the quality and number of application submissions.

DiDonato has been a passionate advocate of arts education throughout her career and personally insisted on offering masterclasses in addition to her other activities with Carnegie Hall, which will include a series of concerts showcasing her prodigious skills with Baroque, Bel Canto, and Contemporary concert music. Over the past few seasons, she has offered masterclasses at the Royal Opera House, the Juilliard School, and Northwestern University.

During her Perspectives residency, she will also participate in Carnegie Hall's Lullaby Project, which helps young expectant mothers and mothers of infants in teen clinics at hospitals, justice settings, and homeless shelters to collaborate with professional musicians to write personal lullabies for their babies.

"One of the things that was so important to me was to include an educational aspect," DiDonato shared in a video produced by Carnegie Hall about the planning of the series. "[As] an educator and a teacher, I always want to feel like there's a higher purpose and that I am a part of something bigger than myself. Here at Carnegie Hall, you have the Weill Music Institute . . . [which] does so many things in terms of reaching out to young musicians."

Nowhere is DiDonato's commitment to mentoring young singers in greater evidence than in her blog post of June 18, 2012, titled "A letter from the heart, to you wonderful, aspiring young artists out there!" Written in response to a message from an 18-year-old blonde mezzo-soprano plagued by pressure to change her hair color, the post challenges readers to strive for personal excellence while remaining absolutely true to themselves and to keep the superficial judgments of others in perspective.

"We need originals," DiDonato wrote. "We need originals desperately, and the only way that will happen is if the business fosters and encourages individuality. We want it, we crave it, and we need it. But the aspiring artists of today also have a responsibility to learn about themselves, to strongly address *why* they need to perform and what they have to say . . . here's hoping you *all* find your own, unique, beautiful, artistic, and soulful way to impact the world around you!"

Join the action on Carnegie Hall's Musical Exchange at [musical-exchange.carnegiehall.org/page/audition-handbook](http://musical-exchange.carnegiehall.org/page/audition-handbook). Find Joyce DiDonato online at [www.joycedidonato.com](http://www.joycedidonato.com), on Twitter at @JoyceDiDonato, and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/pages/Joyce-DiDonato/207466962440](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Joyce-DiDonato/207466962440).

*Disclosure: Claudia Friedlander is an employee of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute and leads the Voice Studio group on Musical Exchange.*

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