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# SINGING

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Debra Greschner

Debra Greschner reviews three recent publications. In *French Lyric Diction: A Singer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), diction instructor Jason Nedecky explains the rules and nuances of French lyric diction. *Rearranged: An Opera Singer's Facial Cancer and Life Transposed* by Kathleen Watt (New York: Heliotrope Books, 2023) is a compelling memoir of a classical singer's battle with bone cancer. *Vocal Technique: A Guide to Classical and Contemporary Styles for Conductors, Teachers, and Singers 2nd Edition* by Julia Davids and Stephen LaTour (Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2021) is substantively expanded upon the first edition that appeared in 2012. The volume now includes information on topics such as styles beyond the classical genre, electronic amplification, and additional vocal exercises.

**Watt, Kathleen. *Rearranged: An Opera Singer's Facial Cancer and Life Transposed*.** New York: Heliotrope Books, 2023. Paper, x, 384 pp., \$20.00 ISBN 978-1-956474-34-3; eBook \$9.99 ISBN 978-1-956474-35-0 [www.heliotropebooks.com](http://www.heliotropebooks.com)

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Anyone who has received the diagnosis of cancer knows the earth-shattering effect of the news. Both the path of treatment and the outcome are uncertainties that hover over every aspect of one's life. For those who are informed that the type of cancer and its treatment will directly affect their ability to continue beloved activities, the clouds of question marks are even more intense. Such was the case for soprano Kathleen Watt when she was diagnosed with bone cancer.

What began as a trip to her dentist to question an odd bump on her upper gum morphed into a decade-long medical journey in the battle against *maxillary osteogenic sarcoma*. The path was circuitous, beginning in the Metropolitan Opera, where Watt was a member of the Opera Chorus, and winding through doctors' offices and operating rooms. Her memoir chronicles how the fabric of her life transitioned from *Cavalleria Rusticana* to *chondrosarcoma*, and from head shots to facial reconstruction. The list of medical professionals she encountered is lengthy, and not all were empathetic. For instance, the lack of compassion shown by an ocular surgeon who questioned her insistence upon repairing one of her eyelids is stunning. "After all, you do have two

of them," he said, in an off-hand way.

However, the volume is not a litany of medical procedures. Interwoven in the listing of surgeries, scans, and infusions is the story of Watt's life. For a singer, the loss of one's voice is earth shattering. Perhaps the most poignant glimpse into this heartbreak is her description of a chance meeting with a former chorus colleague who had been diagnosed with bone cancer in his jaw. Unlike Watt, whose life had been irrevocably changed, he returned to singing in six weeks. The author describes her spiral into an abyss of self-recrimination for the treatment choices she had made, blaming herself for stubbornly trying to save her bones instead of opting for a prosthesis.

But Watt's grit and good humor prevent this book from becoming a saga of sickness. Instead, it is a story of survival. The author's optimism shimmers brightest in the afterword as she summarizes the promising advances made in the treatment of this type of cancer. In *Rearranged*, Watt shares her singular battle with a foe that altered both her physical form and her life. Her story of transposition is a source of inspiration and encouragement for anyone who must face the battle of a lifetime, whatever form it may take.

**Debra Greschner**, soprano, is a member of the voice faculty at Lamar University and founding member of its Vocology Certificate program. She holds a Bachelor of Music in Performance and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, and a Master of Music from the University of Nevada. Before joining the faculty at Lamar, Greschner taught at UNLV, and was a member of the Nevada Arts Council's Artist in Residence roster.

In addition to serving as Associate Editor (Book Reviews) for *Journal of Singing*, she has written book reviews for *The Opera Journal* and *Italica*. Her article "The *Mélodies* of Félix Fourdrain" was published in *Journal of Singing* Volume 73, No. 5 (May/June 2017), and she authored the entry for Fourdrain in the *Grove Music Online*. She was a presenter at the International Congress of Voice Teachers in Vienna in 2022.