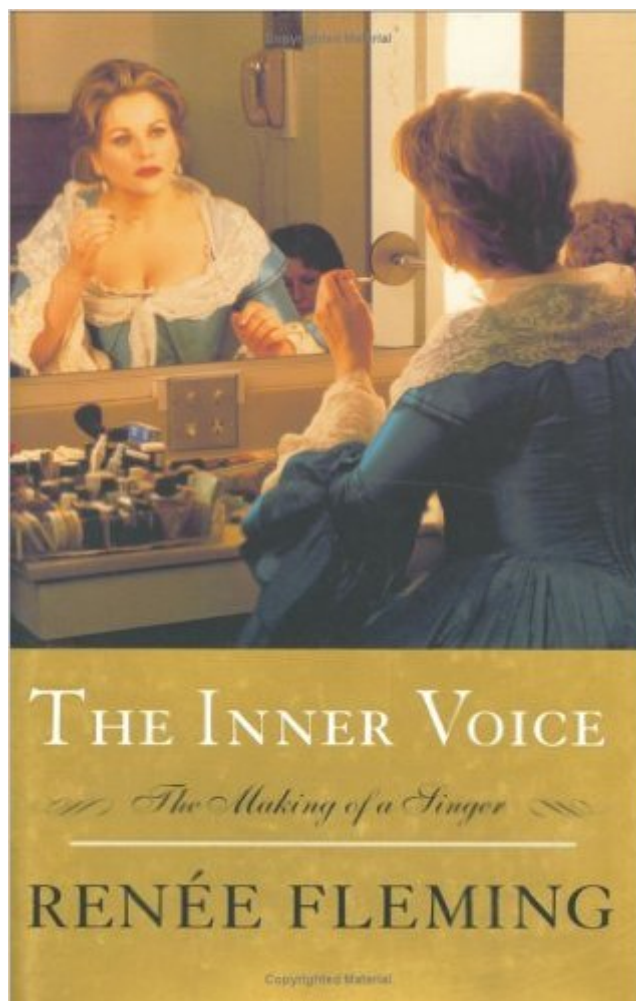


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The Inner Voice: The Making Of A Singer



Synopsis

Blessed with one of the most beautiful voices of her generation, soprano Renée Fleming is one of the most celebrated talents on today's music scene. In *The Inner Voice*, this great singer shares what she has learned from her experience as an inspiration for those contemplating a career in the arts. From struggling to get a career under way to dealing with her own personal doubts, Fleming is wonderfully candid and articulate about her art; especially the little discussed heart-throat-mind connection; and childhood influences, formal education, mentors, preparation, and mental and physical discipline. Here is a look at the real life of an artist today, a life confronted by the loneliness of touring, the need for resilience, the desire for creativity in the face of overwhelming commercial pressures, coping with business issues, and, most important, balancing personal and professional fulfillment. *The Inner Voice* adds its distinctive voice to works such as Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* and Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting*, teaching by example and the hard-won human lessons all artists must learn. It will be eagerly awaited not only by her legion of fans, but will also be required reading for anyone contemplating a career in the arts.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is so high class I hardly know where to begin to recount its virtues. First, it is not a celebrity autobiography and it does not give the inside opera gossip. Thankfully, it is free of the nastiness that so many opera tell-alls seem to revel in. This is the opposite, a gracious recounting of

the creation of a diva's career. Renee Fleming is the voice of experience. Her discussion of vocal technique may be estoteric to general readers, but well the voice student knows how basic is breath support, and that the key to an aria's suitability is not the individual high notes, but the tessitura as a whole. Renee Fleming is the best possible guide to making a lasting career, and she discusses her own mistakes candidly, such as choosing too difficult and unknown material for auditions. No overnight success, she struggled for mastery. She sounds like a balanced person with good basic values. Every disappointment she suffered she managed to turn to her advantage. For example, when she had to attend a state college rather than Oberlin for financial reasons, she found an excellent voice teacher there who helped in grounding her basic technique. Renee Fleming tells us the high points of a diva's impossibly glamorous life, but she also tells us how painful and lonely it is to tour without family and friends. Years ago, I observed an attractive, friendly woman who was attending a Cecilia Bartoli appearance at Tower Records - she was greeted warmly by her friends and called "Renee". I realized that this must be Renee Fleming. This book is the woman I saw -- pleasant, open, realistic, and nice. And much more - knowledgeable about the needs of a career in opera, and generous in conveying her knowledge to others. Ann Patchett, the novelist, is certainly behind the sure, artistic and professional prose style. A lovely book of lasting value.

I knew it had to be more than coincidence that the opera singer Roxane Coss in Ann Patchett's accomplished novel, "Bel Canto", reminded me of Ren e Fleming. As it turns out, Patchett assisted the world-renowned soprano in the writing of her polite yet down-to-earth memoir here. Despite how colorfully punctilious the opera world can be, there is nary a tidbit of gossip to be found in this book, and having performed in the world's leading opera houses, she has probably seen it all and could tell some ribald stories. But she takes a more tactful route and as a result, she comes across as almost academic yet powerfully ambitious. The seemingly contradictory combination actually helps make some of her vaunted statements more reflective than self-serving (for example, "I believe the ultimate goal of an opera singer is to create a legacy"). In fact, Fleming seems intent on providing a primer for rising young singers to learn her lessons with chapter titles such as "Business" and "Image". And she has reason to be heard, as she is probably the only female classical music star today who is comparable to Callas, Sutherland and Sills in stature. Truth be told, Fleming is not as innately likeable as Sills, but I don't think she aspires to be either. She is truly the product of hard work and discipline, values that permeate her career as much as her vast talent. At least, the soprano is honest about her fragile and recalcitrant voice being the product of care and technique rather than positioning it as some inspirational gift to share with the masses. In that vein, I

also like her sharp accounts of brutally honest publicists and managers who have criticized her clothes, her acting and her weight. Fleming is also candid about the challenges she faces in juggling stardom with being the single mother of two. I would think this book would be valuable to any aspiring singer, classical or otherwise, as she goes into great detail about her vocal technique and study habits. For the rest of us, we can be impressed by this accomplished performer from a distance, for Fleming is quite circumspect when it comes to her personal life beyond talking about her children. I don't consider that a failing of this book, but it does make me think what an alternatively interesting book could have been written had Patchett written it strictly in the third person as an observer. I am planning to see Fleming's Met performance of Handel's "Rodelinda" next month co-starring with the amazing countertenor David Daniels, and now that I've read her story, I can fully appreciate how she got there.

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