

# Sassoon Artists Management

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My name is Christina Esser, and I am a mezzo-soprano from Palm Springs California. I was always drawn to the arts, but singing was an unexpected surprise in my life. I spent most of my earlier years drawing, painting, and studying art technique with my aunt, who was a professional studio artist. We would hike to the top of mountains with our art supplies and paint whatever inspired us. Painting the many colors and characteristics of nature always transported me to a vibrant realm that transcended that of reality. I pursued a career in studio art believing it to be my dream. This dramatically shifted after I joined my school choir at the age of 17.

After my first singing lesson, I was moved to tears by the vibrations, resonance, and sheer power that could be expressed with the human voice. It was the first time I truly felt God existed, and that something so ineffable couldn't be of this earth. Music swiftly took over and I spent most of my time listening and studying it. My parents were nervous regarding my sudden decision to pursue music due to the unpredictable nature of a music career, and encouraged me to consider other degrees. I trusted my intuition, decided to audition into a music school, and was thrilled beyond words when I was selected as the only first year to perform in the opera, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* as the role of **Die Dritte Dame**.

After graduating the University of California Santa Barbara, I decided to move to Los Angeles where I could audition and gain more professional experience. At the beginning of my move, I worked three jobs and was quite miserable. I was exhausted, unsuccessful with my auditions, and because of that, debated quitting music. I was a soprano at the time and wasn't sure I was singing in the correct *fach* or with healthy technique. I was discouraged by others from switching my *fach* to mezzo-soprano, but was reminded of my initial decision to pursue music, and of that burning passion and intuition I trusted. I made the switch, and within a few months, was hired by Repertory Opera Company where I performed the roles of **The Monitress** in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, and **Marcellina** in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. I wasn't experiencing any vocal fatigue with this repertoire and felt like I was singing with my own voice. My work with Repertory Opera Company gave me the experience and vocal transition time to begin applying for advanced programs such as an MM degree.

I was honored when I received my acceptance into UCLA's prestigious Herb Alpert School of Music as a mezzo-soprano. Though I had made progress initially switching to mezzo-soprano, I still struggled from the residual vocal fatigue of previous training. I decided to take a leave of absence and to continue solidifying my technique. I began my work with Olga Sergeevna, and after two quarters of intensive lessons, returned to UCLA to begin my studies with baritone Vladimir Chernov. I auditioned for the opera and was selected to portray the title role in the world premier workshop reading of Carla Lucero's opera *Juana* based on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Portraying the role of Juana was a very unique cultural experience for me. My grandparents emigrated to the United States from Mazatlán and Jalisco in the early 1900's, barely speaking English at first. I spent a lot of time with them when I was young and was immersed in hispanic culture. After they passed, this culture seemed to fade away. As I explored my heritage for this opera, I became closer with my mother. My mother has always been supportive, but we didn't connect through music, so as a result, we didn't speak of it together. When I was first assigned this role, she helped me with my Spanish pronunciation, and we sat and reminisced on the history of our family. I can now say opera has brought us closer. This was also my first leading role and a reminder to the importance of trusting my previous intuition. My intuition guided me towards a major performing experience, and also allowed me to reconnect with my family.

During summers, I traveled to Austria as a young artist in the International Vocal Academy of Payerbach Austria, led by Olga Sergeevna and Vladimir Chernov. My time in Austria was the most important aspect of my vocal and artistic development. Olga and Vladimir taught me the importance of having a solid technique, but more importantly, how to be free and vulnerable as a human being. This freedom and understanding of how to protect oneself while being vulnerable on stage completely changed the way I perform, and allowed me to appear more sincere and open during performances. After my final summer in Payerbach, I gained real momentum as a performer, winning my first competition, and obtaining my first professional contracts. This group of experiences are what launched the beginning of my professional career. By slowing down and taking extra time to study, I had actually accelerated my success and learned tools that would last a lifetime. This is something many of us singers fear doing, and we tend to be impatient, wanting immediate results. Ironically by trying to speed up process, we often end up delaying our growth.

Aside from singing, I am passionate about many different aspects of life. I enjoy hiking, playing piano, reading, drawing and painting, writing poetry, and taking photos. My favorite literary genres are philosophy and scientific works by authors such as Nietzsche, Plato, Socrates, Huxley, Hesse, and Hawking. I also enjoy photography and frequently go out into nature with my camera, or ask friends if I may give them photoshoots. I always call my nature shots “nature’s paintings”, and sometimes after a successful photo shoot, I begin to convert these photos into ideas for paintings and sketches, or songs on the piano. I love the feeling of creating something completely new from multiple art mediums.

I do not consider myself solely a singer, but a wholistic artist passionate about exploring the world and expressing its beauty. I’ve always felt so blessed to see the world in such vivid color and with deep emotion, and nothing brings me more joy than sharing this with others. I am always hoping my expression will inspire others in the same way art and life as a whole have inspired me. The most important lesson I have learned on this journey thus far, is the importance of trusting my intuition, for it has always been my most reliable guide. My advice to young singers starting out, is to make sure you aren’t just following the logic of a situation, but also what is in your heart. Don’t be afraid to fail by trying something new, because truthfully, failure is not really failure at all. If one is willing to learn and grow from a situation, I believe these “failures” are what can shape a brilliant artist.