

Singers and agents **Parting gracefully?**



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The music world is abuzz with speculation about star mezzo Joyce DiDonato's recent split from her longterm agents at Intermusica. Christopher Gillett, a veteran agent-swapper himself, asks what Askonas Holt have that her old agents don't...



The news that [Joyce DiDonato \(/uk/learn/artists/joyce-didonato\)](#) has changed agents is hardly headline-grabbing stuff for anyone outside the music biz – although tongues have been wagging on the inside. She had been with her previous agent from the beginning, so why the sudden move to the massive corporate behemoth that is Askonas Holt? They have famously good Christmas parties. Perhaps it was that.

The once all-powerful agent Tom Graham once compared swapping agents to changing deckchairs on the Titanic. While DiDonato is hardly on a doomed passage – far from it – I can only wonder what difference changing agents will make. Pin me down on it and I'd guess that Askonas Holt offers her a level of mass exposure that her previous agent could not.

Changing agents is a fraught business, almost exactly like the break-up of a romantic relationship or even divorce. 'I feel it's time to move on, for both of us' – 'It's just not working any more' – 'It's not you, it's me'. In truth, the artist is actually thinking: 'It's ALL you and nothing to do with me. I'm working my arse off – what are you doing? I'm outta here!' And the agent is thinking: 'Fine, off you go. You were a pain in the backside and besides, there are plenty more fish in the sea.'

'My agent doesn't understand me any more...'

Agents are forbidden by their association rules from poaching artists. They can't offer an artist representation if they already have an agent; it's the artist who has to make the approach. That's not to say that agents don't make the signals obvious (flirting like ardent 15-year-olds at a school disco) but it's

the artist who has take the plunge, bringing with it all the feelings of guilt, shame and rationalisation of a sordid affair: 'My agent doesn't understand me any more...'

I'm on my eighth agency, which makes me sound a bit of a scoundrel. In my defence, I moved with one agent to three different agencies, and three agents decided that agenting wasn't for them any more, leaving me in arranged marriages that didn't work out.

But good luck to Joyce in her new relationship. The champagne corks will certainly have been popping at Askonas Holt. Meanwhile at her old agency, Intermusica, it will be all empty boxes of tissues, getting up late and hanging around the house all day in pyjamas, sighing and eating Ben & Jerry's straight from the tub.

Read more of **Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music (/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs)**.

The tenor's own blog is **christophergillett.co.uk. (http://christophergillett.co.uk/)**

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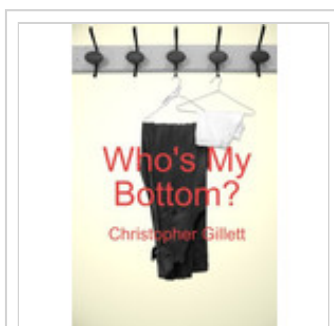
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