

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I am inspired by the beauty of the human voice, by its power to stir emotions and to deepen our shared human experience. Guiding singers who share this love of the voice as they refine their unique gifts is the central passion of my work. It is also a challenge, as the singer's instrument is invisible to both teacher and performer and sounds different to the singer than to the audience. Additionally, the voice is produced by delicate muscles that require precise coordination. I have respect for the trust my students place in me as we work together to build a strong technical and artistic foundation. I work daily to expand my skills as a performer, pedagogue and mentor so that I may serve as the best possible advocate for their growth.

AURAL IMAGINATION – I believe a successful professional singer must have both a personal sound ideal and a strong diagnostic ear. Therefore, I spend significant studio time developing my students' aural imagination. I challenge my students to identify the specific qualities they find most compelling in their favorite singers and performances. Are they most moved by an unwaveringly resonant tone, an expressive legato line, flawlessly efficient diction, meticulous attention to musical style, or compelling dramatic choices? As students immerse themselves in their craft by listening to live performances and recordings of world class artists, we work together to explore their aural imagination and refine their critical ear. Part of this exploratory process is working together to evaluate their own sound, and begin matching the sound they produce with their artistic intentions.

AUTHENTIC SOUND - I encourage students to identify and embrace their unique vocal qualities and interpretive strengths. Each student arrives with different aptitudes, physical characteristics, previous singing training, speech habits, and learning preferences. Some students respond best to use of imagery, while others hunger for concrete information about vocal anatomy and function. Some have an interest in cultivating crossover potential while others are striving towards an operatic ideal. Some respond best to kinesthetic approaches such as the Dalcroze method, while others show a greater spark when challenged with historical research and writing assignments. Certain singers arrive with strong interpretive skills, while others need guidance as they analyze text in detail, explore character motivation, and connect to their personal reservoir of life experience. There are students who are completely distracted by watching a spectrogram, and others for whom the visualization of overtones in real time is the best way to effect changes in tone quality, vowel clarity, or diction. I continue to be a dedicated student of current research and best practices in pedagogy so that I may draw from a broad set of tools as I tailor each student's training.

SPACE FOR EXPERIMENTATION – I believe that it is the teacher's responsibility to create a studio space in which students feel safe enough to try something that feels (or sounds) very different from their comfortable habit, even if it "fails." I hold this safe space for my students, and I challenge them to use their lesson time to take risks. We may delve into the text by performing it as a spoken monologue in front of the mirror, or we may listen to recordings of their last lesson together at top volume to overcome self-criticism. My intention is to step to the edge of their comfort zone with them, and together, to open new space for progress.

MUSICAL INDEPENDENCE – I endeavor to equip students with skills they can employ as independent musicians long after their formal training is complete. To this end, I design assignments that encourage agency and challenge students to see themselves as forward-thinking professionals from the outset of their studies. For

example, rather than assigning pieces one by one, I prefer to give students listening lists that include 5-to-10 pieces suitable for specific aspects of their development. I ask them to research the pieces, listen to recordings, translate the texts, and *then* choose to work on the two songs with which they feel the greatest connection. To cultivate musical independence, I vocalize moving passages over a sustained sonority, rather than doubling their pitches, whenever possible. I challenge the students to design Capstone recital programs that carefully showcase their artistic intentions as well as their current vocal and interpretive strengths. I require them to write program notes that articulate that vision for their audience. I hope that crafting activities that encourage agency and self-reliance at the student level will prepare students to transition easily into independent artists ready to build sustained and flexible careers in the modern marketplace.

MENTORSHIP AND MODELING – I am a teacher who is not only dedicated to best practices in pedagogy, but who continues to refine her craft and regularly “walk the walk” as a performer. I take every opportunity to perform for and with my students, both on campus and off. I also acknowledge that a successful career requires more than musical skill. Young singers must have access to opportunities, and they must have the business sense to know how to invest their time and resources. Therefore, I actively network to help open doors for my students whenever possible, and coach them as they build their own professional networks. I ensure that students both stretch themselves within the intimate and nurturing environment at Southwestern and regularly test their skills within their regional and national peer groups. I take an active hand in guiding young singers’ strategic thinking as they make choices about auditions, summer programs, and competitions. In addition, my work in the nonprofit sector enables me to mentor students in the business aspects of the field, from crowdfunding endeavors to grant applications, further nurturing their entrepreneurial skills.

LIBERAL ARTS VALUES – A compelling performance involves, at minimum, a thorough study of musical structure and style, vocal technique, stagecraft, historical context, languages, diction, acoustics, and literature. It also requires an ability to be deeply thoughtful, vulnerable, and empathetic. The liberal arts educational environment provides an ideal framework for singers to develop the full scope of both their talents and their humanity. I fully embrace the liberal arts’ emphasis on intellectual challenge and interdisciplinary learning. My dual degree in Gender Studies and Music, first explored during my own undergraduate liberal arts education, informs both my performing and my teaching. It influences my daily decisions, such as repertoire choices and the types of questions I pose to students. It has also shaped long-term collaborative projects that culminate in student Capstone recitals and conference presentations. I actively encourage my students to bring their own broad palate of perspectives into play as they think deeply and comprehensively about their creative work.

COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT – As they begin their careers, singers will enter an extremely competitive professional environment. In order to remain optimistic amidst the pressure and inevitable rejection, singers must be emotionally grounded. Collegiality is a strong antidote to the competitive aspects of the singing business that can undermine an aspiring performer. Thus, I aim to prepare rigorously trained musicians who are also respectful and collaborative colleagues. My colleagues and I model this mindset every week when we co-teach a studio master class in which we work with each other’s students. In order to foster community among the students who take individual lessons, I require them to share their goals and practice-room challenges in an online discussion forum. I intentionally program duets and small ensembles in recitals to encourage collegiality. This collaborative approach extends to the teacher-student relationship as well. I view lessons as a partnership in which both teacher and student are genuinely invested in the work of discovering and refining the singer’s unique vocal and artistic qualities.