

LEA PETERSON

Teaching Philosophy

The truth of singing is that it involves a vulnerable and unseen portion of the body while simultaneously demanding each singer take part in the universal tradition of music making. This truth is precisely what makes singing so invigorating, electric, and irresistible: each singer's instrument is singularly and completely unique. Because of this, as a teacher I think it is essential for me to emphasize the unique capabilities of each student's voice. Many beginning singers compare their own voice to what they hear from others, so as a voice teacher I take it as one of my primary responsibilities to remind every singer that no two voices are the same. Through an understanding of technique and knowledge of the anatomy of the voice, students can begin to appreciate their own individual skills and enjoy the distinct abilities of their own instrument.

The largest challenge and longest ongoing goal I face is to help a student understand the sensations they are feeling and build a vocabulary around vocal technique. Many teachers will simply download their own technical vocabulary on a student and urge them to memorize it. However, because a student cannot see their instrument, as let's say a violinist can, the language means nothing to them until they understand the sensations behind the techniques. That is why I believe the key to creating a successful and self-sustaining singer is to allow the student to define their own technical language. I certainly help to shape, guide, and answer questions but the ultimate agency must come from the singer themselves. Furthermore, as we define their technique and apply it to repertoire the student is also learning musicianship, rhythm, pitch control, dynamics, and diction – making them a full and well-rounded musician.

I make sure that all my students begin with an anatomical understanding of the voice and all the physical components which make it up. Once a student can visualize their instrument we can begin developing a shared vocabulary for the tools at their disposal. I let the student do this by guiding them to a technique and then having them explain it back to me. For instance, let's say I describe to a student what a bright voice means. I will demonstrate and give them certain prompts to understand what bright sound is. Once they make the sound successfully, I can ask them: "what did that feel like to you?" Each time they sing I will ask them to define what they feel in their tongue, their jaw, their face, etc. Now, in the next lesson, I have a vocabulary with this student which I can use as a jumping off point for the next technique; each step of the way building a vocabulary and pedagogical understanding.

Through this technique not only do students learn about the voice but they learn about taking risks, advocating for themselves, and creating art. Through my own passions I create a space that is simultaneously joyful and rigorous. A space that teaches the joys and rewards of hard work, as I myself am entrenched in the throes of becoming a more effective and more knowledgeable singer. My students see that, and whether or not they pursue a creative career they have learned that any goal can be broken down to its simplest parts with hard work and knowledge.