

New teacher feature questionnaire

1. Who or what inspired you to pursue music in general and specifically to teach and perform?

I was incredibly blessed to have been helped by so many generous people in my early years. While in grade one at my K-12 Catholic school, my family entered me in a talent competition and I won with the song “Why does the sun go on shining”, sung unaccompanied. That song choice still makes me chuckle! I taught myself guitar, joined the Catholic church folk choir, and soon began to get hired to sing at weddings and funerals thanks to the recommendations of Father Gerald Biollo. After a year of guitar lessons, my teacher (Chico) started inviting me to sing with his band in restaurants and lounges. At the ripe old age of 15, I was referred by him to teach guitar classes at Cariboo College (now Thompson River University) which I did until I graduated high school. What fun we had! While in hospital for cancer treatment, I often sang for a wonderful older woman named Doris to bring her cheer. When she died, her husband paid me a surprise visit to gift me with a brand new Martin guitar. I will be forever overwhelmed by this gesture. A leading role in the high school musical directed by Pamela Allen left a lasting impression and – after entering a province-wide talent search to perform on the Variety Club Telethon – I was invited to perform at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in 1980. These experiences influenced my decision to pursue music studies as a guitar major. During my audition at Vancouver Community College, Dr. Jacob Hamm convinced me to take voice as my primary, rather than secondary, instrument. This was when I got hooked on vocal pedagogy! Dr. Hamm became a wonderful mentor and went above and beyond to answer my never-ending list of questions about “how the voice works”. He even convinced me that an anonymous donor had paid for me to attend lessons with him over the summer before I transferred to UBC Music Department the next year. The impresario was Dr. Hamm of course but, like a dope, I believed him! Unlike many singers who teach in and around singing engagements, teaching has been, and always will be, my calling. It is a way for me to give back and maybe make a difference in someone’s life just as so many have done for me.

2. a) What and where have you performed recently?

During a recent visit to Hong Kong, I was asked to perform Bach’s “Mein gläubiges Herze” at Union Church where I was music director for several years (it is sadly being torn down). Before that, I sang at a faculty recital at Red Deer College, Alberta where I had a full-time teaching appointment (voice, chamber choir, aural skills, musical theatre, music history). I sang a couple of Granados’ “Tonadillas”, “Jubal’s Lyre”, and “Esurientes implevit bonis” with my colleague, Sharon Braun.

b) Do you have any upcoming performances and where?

I have some future recording projects with composer and recording artist friends in Toronto (where I lived from 2009-2016) and England (where I lived from 2000-2009) coming up, some of which will be in-house while others – in this glorious digital age – can be recorded remotely and uploaded to Google Drive!

3. What and where do you teach?

I have a beautiful home studio in Vancouver West where I teach students of varying ages and abilities during the school year, and a small number of international students during the summer months sent by

colleagues from Hong Kong (where I lived from 1995-2000). I specialize in vocal injury and have worked with many professional singers in vocal crisis over the years. I also do various school and community choir workshops (some sponsored by the Vancouver School Board), summer schools and workshops in Vancouver and Toronto, and adjudicate festivals in Canada and Hong Kong. I have a doctorate from the University of Oxford (specializing in ethnomusicology) and facilitate community engagement projects with choirs in North America focused on cross-cultural music-making. Vocal coaching is part of this work (ex: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05G0YEjcEIE>).

Based on *bel canto* principles, I work from a diagnostic point of view and assess a student's vocal production in relation to what Barbara Doscher (1988) describes as the "functional unity" of the voice. I break down vocal processes (i.e.: respiration, phonation, appoggio, resonance, articulation, and registration) and introduce them to students as a series of building blocks (or events) to encourage students to explore how the voice works inter-relationally as a complex whole. In tandem, I help students to recognize vocal and/or other physical tensions which may be restricting or preventing their instrument from functioning naturally. Sometimes this involves a process of 'undoing', leading the voice towards its own economy of function. As the proper musculature is assessed, strengthened, and employed, each problem is addressed in a variety of ways. While this taps into the student's particular way of learning, it also helps identify and correct individual vocal weaknesses.

I apply a holistic approach to vocal studies which recognizes the singer's 'body' as their instrument. Revealing how the body can be negatively affected by things such as stress, fatigue, and emotions, I aid students in learning how to recognize the emotional and physical signs of vocal distress, and develop skills to reverse these processes. I use a variety of 'embodied' vocal techniques such as Feldenkrais (Vancouver 1989, Toronto 2010), Alexander technique (Marta Hunter, Vancouver, 1990-1992), and vocal massage (Toronto Voice Clinic, Dr. Aaron Low, 2015) and place focus on the student's somatic experience and self-understanding. The overall aim is to enable students to correct vocal faults outside my studio so they can avoid over-singing and other forms of habitual vocal abuse.

4. What are your favourite:

a) websites and mobile tools

I have taught courses in vocal physiology at the University of Reading (England), and the University of Windsor (Ontario) so have developed various audio-visual materials along the way. While unable to share these here, I have drawn on the following online resources that explain vocal processes in a simplified and succinct way.

Dr. Ingo Titze: <http://www.ncvs.org/ncvs/tutorials/voiceprod/index.html>.

Eric Armstrong: <http://www.yorku.ca/earmstro/journey/>.

Dr. James Thomas: <http://www.voicedoctor.net/Media>.

Johan Sundberg: <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/Music/singfor.html>.

VoiceCare Network: <http://www.voicecarenetwork.org/>.

NATS: <http://www.vocapedia.info/>.

I have taught college-level courses in ear training/sight-singing and use audio/visual materials developed in those contexts (Berkowitz, ABRSM, RCM, Sibelius).

Student cell phones to record sounds and learn through biofeedback.

b) singers and why?

I adore Baroque music and have taught various university courses in Baroque history (University of Oxford, Red Deer College), and worked with Baroque experts John Elliot Gardner and Edward Higginbottom. My favorite singers emulate correct performance practice, showing a clear understanding of the French and Italian schools (and their influences in England and Germany), coupled with excellent vocal production: Julia Lezhneva, Cecilia Bartoli, Philippe Sly, and Philippe Jaroussky. My other specialty is French song and Diana Damrau is not only exceptional technically, but also has the ability to sculpt the proper architecture of French art song using extreme dynamics and varied tone colour.

c) books related to your craft?

Kristin Linklater (1976) *Freeing the Natural Voice*; William Vennard (1967) *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*; Eloise Ristad (1981) *A Soprano on Her Head: Right-Side-Up Reflections on Life and Other Performances*; Richard Miller (1986) *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*; Johan Sundberg (1987) *The Science of the Singing Voice*; Barbara Doscher (1988) *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*; James C. McKinney (1994) *The Diagnosis And Correction Of Vocal Faults: A Manual For Teachers Of Singing And For Choir Directors*; Ingo Titze (1994) *Principles of Voice Production*; James Stark (2003) *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*.