

TEACHER INTERVIEW: Transcript

Q: How would you describe your music education background?

A: "Okay, throughout my whole life, was involved in music. So, grade 3- 13 I was at a private music school and as part of that education I was required to take piano lessons, theory lessons, and then everyday sang in an ensemble. At 1 o'clock school would stop and you'd go sing in your ensemble . I had performance throughout the year, tours, so very very active music education background. And then, in university I went to the University of Toronto in their music education program. And it was good having theory, piano, and vocal background prepared me really really well for that program. Then after for years I had the opportunity to pursue my masters and I decided not to, I decided to go to teacher's college. You so know, really piano was a huge part of my background and I really think it should be like that for every music student. It'll help theory, it'll help your sight reading, dictation, ensemble singing. And for me that was probably the most important part of my music education. But I think initially doing music throughout my whole life and everyone did at the school, I don't think that was the number one option for me. So I decided to pursue like a, pre-law courses and that wasn't very good it was a bit of a disaster. But at the same time I was still doing lots of music. It was my mom that said 'you know you aren't in a very happy place, why not pursue what you're spending all your extra time doing.' And I did and immediately when I went in, I knew it was right for me. It was right away, you know? And I was doing a lot of volunteer stuff too which really helped. Once I got into the classroom, that's when I realized that's what I wanted to do."

Q: Did you know right away that you wanted to be a teacher?

A: "No, it didn't really firm itself up until 3rd year. Then I worked with one particular professor and uh I just really enjoyed it. Then I started doing some conducting and I could see that's something I had a lot of success with. And the performance side, although I was doing lots of it I didn't see it as something I wanted to do because it's very stressful. You know anxiety, and I just couldn't see myself being on task, all the time. And that's what performance majors are. Just all the time. And that's not something that I wanted to do. So."

Q: Do you have a philosophy when it comes to Music Education?

A: "Hm, I would say one of them is try as many things as you possibly can. Like don't shy away, even it's an uncomfortable thing. That you've gotta expose yourself. Like when I was at UofT I did historical ensemble, I did chamber choir, I did contemporary ensemble which was totally different. We were singing abstract stuff, but again it expanded me. So again, just trying different things. And not being afraid, like you gotta put yourself out there. Like I was extremely shy, and over time I just became more confident. So just try."

Q: What would you say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses in terms of your teaching?

A: "uhm.. I would say for strengths I have the ability to pull things together. Really well. And uh, maybe relate to the students well or at least get along with them well I guess? But I'm also very structured and organized with what I wanna do so that really helps me stay on task. Weakness? I'm not always the most patient person but that's a personality trait. Or I'm not always the most focused. I can get distracted easily so. Funny I probably find more weaknesses than I do strengths but I'm always trying to do things better. So if a group doesn't perform well my first reaction is what did I do wrong? Did I not start early enough? Did I not break that piece down? So I think sometimes we jump ahead. Especially musically, I can get note driven? And I can forget the stylistic part of it. Sometimes I need to remind myself of this stuff for me. So I really wonder sometimes "is it too technical?" So, my repertoire changes have started to change."

Q: Can you describe one or some of your best memories as a teacher?

A: "You know I always get a kick out of a group that can perform a piece well and perform it the way I wanted it. So, and then they feel really good about that performance. Like taking charge of chamber choir and initially it was a little slow, then it started picking up, and I could hear the sound difference and it just gets better and better. But I don't know if there's one particular moment. I don't know hearing you guys come back, and hearing good things you know about your experiences here. And ultimately, I think its years from now that we'll really see the benefit of what we're doing. Like what are you doing years from now? And if you're teaching?

Awesome. It means we had an impact on you in some way and you have a career. And we want you to be happy doing what you're doing. So I don't think its one moment, because every student has different moments. And it could just be a student coming up and having a conversation with me thats totally not music related, that means they're comfortable with that. I don't think its something in particular. Uh, each of those trips were great. Last year... Uh maybe if I was gonna pick one moment maybe being at that Festival of Lights and being recognized for so many different things. Because we don't really think of that? Because if you told me 'McCallen, you really gotta pay more attention to that.' I'm gonna do it. Because you're in the program. I was in the program years ago, so I want hear what you have to say. You never ever stop. Because I don't want my students to think I'm stopping. I'm learning all the time."

REFLECTION:

I feel that after this interview I left knowing many things I didn't before about a teacher I thought I knew very well. I would have never imagined that initially he did not see himself pursuing music at all. After having him teach me for four years, it just seemed to always come so naturally to him and it was interesting to know that to him at the time, having a very intensive music education led him to choose something totally different. Furthermore, I cannot imagine him being "shy" at all. I feel that this goes to show how much he has grown throughout his musical career and all the work he put into becoming the teacher and musician he is now. I feel his philosophy towards music education really resonated with me, mainly because it is something that I struggle with and I feel like the knows that. I think I have come a long way in terms of my confidence towards trying new things but there is always room for improvement. Speaking of which it was nice to hear that he is always looking to learn new things and does not want his students to believe he has stopped learning as this encourages me to keep moving forward in my education as he is even after being out of school for years.