

## Cornelia Lotito

### Teaching Philosophy

I believe that every person has the ability to sing and make music. Everyone, from early childhood to late adulthood, has the power inside of them to become a singer. I do not promise my students miracles, but with consistent practice, hard work, and good instruction, all my students are capable of producing beautiful sounds. I also believe that there is no one exclusive, “correct” way of singing, but rather that teachers should strive to make sure their students have as many colors and timbres available to them so that they might make their own artistic decisions. As a teacher, I find it necessary to stay relevant and aware of modern trends in vocal production and aesthetic goals. It is very important to me that my students are able to experience vocal success in any and all of the genres and vocal styles they choose to study. It is also of vital importance that teachers create independent students who have some degree of control in their own artistic journeys, even for very young teen and child singers. The goal of teaching to me is developing students who have their own individual natural sounds, tastes, and strengths. Each person on this planet has something important to say, and it is my job to help people find *their* way to say it through the power of music.

Each student learns differently. I find that it is incumbent upon the teacher to work with these styles, not against them. I do not believe that there is only one way to explain a concept, and I will use visual diagrams, physical exercises, imagery, and sound examples in my studio. -- whatever it takes to create a deeper understanding of a concept and help that student to develop their voice. If a student is highly interested in a specific subject, genre, or style of singing, I will always try my best to meet the student halfway and find some repertoire that can keep the student interested while also serving greater pedagogical purposes.

For me, the most important thing for most singers is finding a clean, supported tone free of strain or excess air. I strive for efficiency in my own singing and I set similar goals for my upper-level students. For me, this means “low” and “balanced” breath -- that elusive concept of appoggio that engages both the abdominal and intercostal muscles. I believe many singers feel things differently, and so I will reference the lower abdomen, back, ribs, or even the pelvic floor -- whatever is most effective for the way that specific student feels a fully supported sound. In resonance, I like to find a place of balance

between the bright and the dark, often by using mixed vowels and feeling the sensation of those vowels. It is very important to me that my students think critically about how they feel each sensation, and that they can feel the difference between different resonances. I find that this can begin at any level, even rank beginners can feel the dramatic difference between an [i] and an [u] vowel. As students continue to study, they will develop a sense of what each sensation feels like to them, and as such I do not use placement charts or phrases like “in the mask” unless I am trying to meet them where a previous teacher left off. It is most important to me that my students are capable of their own critical thought in the studio, and can understand for themselves what healthy singing feels like. I also find that in dealing with different registers it is important for students to be able to access as many colors as possible on every note, and this guides my teaching of registration. I do not believe in permanent, fixed register breaks that are immovable and obvious, but instead I aim for a connection between all registers of the voice that create one unified sound and the ability to approach each note in a variety of ways. However, this level of fine-tuning is largely my goal for upper-level students.

For younger students, I am most focused on getting my singers to love the sounds they make. There are far too many self-conscious children out there who break themselves down before they even get a chance to begin. It is very important to me that my young singers are inspired, excited, and enjoy the act of singing while in my studio. For these students, it is vital that they learn not only repertoire and technique, but also music theory, aural skills, basic musicianship, and music history. Technique for these very young students may consist largely of posture and breath control habits, but these skills are incredibly valuable for a young singer’s future development. I incorporate music composition, movement and dance, ear training exercises, sight-reading, and basic music theory into each lesson with a younger student, because I understand that not every young child will go on to be a musician or a singer, but every child will grow to be a music listener and a music lover.

For older students and collegiate singers, I prioritize meeting academic and aesthetic/technical standards and setting my students up for careers beyond the university. Even when teaching Class Voice to non-majors at University of Tennessee, I made sure to encourage my students to seek opportunities to use their voices to go beyond the curriculum. Whether my students audition for musicals, sing in public for the first time, or perform in open mic nights, I find it incredibly important

that they continue to improve their singing and their performance opportunities. There is always room for growth and students should be encouraged to try new vocal experiences and discover for themselves what is necessary for the career they are trying to build. For more serious students, it is important to look ahead to the future and build long-term goals for the singer to meet on the road to a sustainable singing career.

I am always wary of studios in which every singer sounds the same. My aesthetic ideals for my students are that the production is healthy, that it sounds clean and accurate, that there is an appropriate sense of vocal and musical style to their singing, and that the sound is fundamentally balanced. I want each of my students to develop every part of their voice; creating versatile singers that are not afraid of new challenges is a major goal of vocal instruction.

In selecting repertoire, it is of great importance that a) students enjoy at least some aspect of the pieces they are learning and b) that the repertoire is chosen with pedagogical goals in mind. Students need to be encouraged at the same time that they are pushed. I try not to push my own musical tastes on my students, and I encourage them to listen to music and bring me suggestions of their own. Again, building young artists with tastes and ideas of their own is very important to me, so if a student has a particular interest that does not typically correspond with singing like video game music or sports, I think it is important to help students find pieces that speak to these interests. However, I also strive to choose repertoire for my students that will help them further practice technical skills we are learning in the studio. I find that this helps them apply vocal exercises done during warm-ups to their repertoire, as well as to all future repertoire. We cannot learn without practice, and one does not learn how to sing songs by only singing exercises. Repertoire must be at the core of what we do as teachers or we have failed our students. A good selection of repertoire will also allow the student to experience different emotional places, to tell different stories, and to explore different cultures and languages. Repertoire can be incredibly valuable as a voice building tool, but it can also be a vehicle through which we study music history, music theory, language, diction, and performance.