

My singing journey

I discovered the joy of singing when I joined Skylark Children's Choir at age 6. Choir director Bente Goldstein, taught by the motto, "Act Locally and Think Globally". We were exposed to songs from all over the world, which we learned by heart and usually in their original languages. Bente told us that music would help us to connect to people in other countries, where ever we might choose to go – and it has!

Singing became part of every day. I sang while cleaning the horse stalls on our farm, weeding the garden and washing dishes. I sang to the animals, with my sister, my friends, my parents, my teachers. Song was courage when I had to go through the dark woods alone, comfort when one of my animal friends died, and refuge from parts of life I couldn't understand. It provided a way to say the things I could not express with words. I loved to sing so much that my mother asked if I would like to take singing lessons. "No", I said, singing was not to be studied. That would ruin it.

When I entered the teenage years, everything in life felt more difficult. I couldn't handle my emotions, so I decided it was easiest to ignore them. I began singing more difficult songs.

I loved the thrill of singing alone, in front of people. Some songs had emotions I couldn't understand or feel as my own, but I pressed them into my voice, to make it sound more impressive. Singing became more difficult, less free. At age 14, I decided I would try singing lessons after all. My mother found a teacher at the Wisconsin Conservatory. She seemed enthusiastic, and open to the international music I loved so much, so I decided to try.

To begin with, I loved my singing lessons. It was wonderful to sing in Italian, in the beautiful conservatory, while someone played the piano. I loved learning music, I loved practicing and I loved performing. I liked my teacher and got along well with her, but I did not want to sound like her. I hated heavy vibrato, and was certain my voice did not, and would not have vibrato. In my mind, I had already decided that I would eventually go to Norway to study singing, because people there sang with more natural vibrato. I told my mother that my voice was like a wild horse that needed its freedom.

Singing was still, for the most part, enjoyable. My homeschool group performed two children's operas (The Little Sweep by B. Britten, and Amal and the Night Visitors by G. C. Menotti). I took leading roles in both ('Rowan' and 'Mother' respectively). This same year, I also entered a few Irish singing competitions, from which I brought home trophies. Although

I still loved singing, it was becoming increasingly clear that my voice was not healthy. It started to break noticeably in two places. It got to the point where I couldn't sing a performance without complicated preparations, including avoiding dairy products for three days, and putting my head over a steaming pot of water before performances. I felt something was very wrong, but I had no idea what it was, or what to do about it.

A few years earlier, my mother had taken me to take a trial lesson with Mary Thienes Schunemann, a singer, Waldorf music teacher, and author of several children's song books. Mary said her work was based on the Werbeck Method of singing, or School of Uncovering the Voice, but no one really knew what that was. Mary did a few exercises with me, but really didn't have time for private students. When I started having difficulties with my voice, Mary became terminally ill with cancer. I babysat for her a few times. On the last occasion, as my mother and I were walking out the door, Mary said, "If I had a daughter who wanted to sing, I would send her to Finland." Mary died tragically shortly after this, so I never got the opportunity to ask her why.

As problems with my voice, and my teacher, multiplied, Mary's words came back to me. Mary produced two CDs in her final weeks, in which the impact of her work with Werbeck's exercises could be heard in the amazing purity and beauty of her tone. When I heard these recordings, I realized that there was something there, the something I was longing to find in singing.

At this point, my teacher and I disagreed quite often. The situation became increasingly tense, until I decided I had to stop taking lessons from her. For my 17th birthday, right at the time I had decided to quit, a friend gave me Werbeck's book, *Uncovering the Voice*. Even though I could not understand much of it, I felt drawn to Werbeck's work, and inspired by her biography.

During this summer, I made the decision



to study and live with a host family in Norway. My mother and I searched the internet for a singing school in Finland, and Werbeck singing, but couldn't find anything. My mother discussed our quest for a mysterious singing school in Finland with one of her friends, who then discussed it further with one of her own acquaintances, who happened to know someone who had travelled to Finland to study singing with Christiaan Boele.

Once in Norway, I got in contact with Christiaan, who recommended that I come to visit Snellman-korkeakoulu for one week in September. The trip was an exciting adventure; the first trip I organized alone. The first challenge was convincing my school coordinator that it was very important that I miss a week of school – and that I should get 'creativity' credit for it. Mission accomplished, I was off to Finland; a country where I knew no one, and knew little about.

After a week at Snellman-korkeakoulu, I decided that this type of singing training had the quality I had been searching for. I travelled to Germany or Finland for short periods over the next two years while completing my international baccalaureate diploma studies, and then some longer periods during my gap year. After spending a year of travelling, working, and volunteering, I decided that I wanted to study the

School of Uncovering the Voice seriously. The only problem was that at this point, there was no official school under which one could study with Christiaan Boele, and Christiaan travelled so much that I was not sure how regular lessons would be possible.

A friend, mentor and fellow student had just completed a year of travelling studies with Christiaan. She helped me to realize for myself what I really wanted to do, and to sort through the practicalities of organizing and financing (with great help from my grandparents!) my travel studies. Thanks to the help and support of family and friends, and kind strangers, I was able to spend one year travelling through Germany, Switzerland, Finland and the USA with Christiaan Boele. During this time, I took lessons, practiced intensely, and joined in singing courses of all different levels and sizes. I lived with a variety of kind hosts, to whom I will be always grateful, and worked where ever possible.

Near the end of the year, I joined the first Lauluvuosi class for their school trip and ending performance. It became clear that Lauluvuosi would continue the following year, and that two others were hoping to complete their singing diploma ending in two years, as I was. Since I knew another year of travelling would not be financially or practically feasible, I realized that I had to choose between continuing my singing studies at Snellman-korkeakoulu, or giving up Werbeck singing and studying something else.

Over the summer, I applied for a Finnish study visa, as well as applying to universities elsewhere. I received a positive answer on the visa just as I was about to accept my university enrollment, and came to study singing at Snellman-korkeakoulu. It is a decision I have not regretted!

Lauluvuosi toimii Snellman-korkeakoulun sivutoimiyksikkönä.

*Lisätietoja: www.snellman-korkeakoulu.fi/
Koulutusohjelmat/Laulun opinnot.*

*Alicia on perustanut kahden opiskelijatoverinsa
Trio Katharmoksen, jonka löytää facebookista!*



APURAHA

NORENSEn (Nordic Research Network for Steiner Education) johtokunta ottaa vastaan hakemuksia steinerpedagogiikalle merkittävistä tutkimus- ja kehityshankkeista. Vuoden 2014 avustushakemukset tulee jättää 21.2.2014 mennessä.

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