

Susan Davies

Soprano

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Teaching Philosophy

Voice lessons provide a safe, supportive, challenging, and kindly critical environment for singers to experiment with their voices and uncover unknown potential. I encourage my students to claim their space – with their voices, their bodies, their presence, their energy. Singing is a continuous discovery of self, and I believe that anybody who wants to learn to sing will be able to build a functional technique that aligns with their goals. My approach combines science and somatic learning to guide students of all ages and levels to self-discovery and artistic empowerment.

It's easy to be our own harshest critics and to focus on what we *can't* do vocally and artistically, so I ask students in their very first lesson what they like most about their voice. It's crucial to know what we do well before we can tackle all the things we'd like to improve; we need to clarify our starting place. I like to steer clear of descriptions like “good vs. bad” and “right vs. wrong” and to challenge students to reexamine their own descriptive language when it comes to evaluating their voices. I approach lessons with humor and playfulness to address both technical and dramatic elements, as well as to put students at ease. It's much easier to find vocal freedom, efficiency, and dependability while having fun than while being self-judgmental.

I believe that every singer should have a functional knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of their instrument. I use my background in vocal pedagogy and Body Mapping to help students uncover the key features of the voice (using pictures, verbal descriptions, and external representations). I use a broad-to-narrow approach in teaching, often beginning with whole-body concepts (for example, balance, movement of the breathing structures) before delving into finer understanding of resonance, articulation, etc. While a student is building the mental map of their instrument, I find it more productive to begin with parts of the instrument which can be easily seen and felt. I adapt my language to suit each student, so that I can help make the unseen attainable and the physiology clear so that it can be utilized. Very rarely do students simply stand and sing for an entire lesson; in order to explore the unknown, we have to do the unexpected! I often incorporate productive movement and use props (such as yoga balls, stretchy bands, and straws) in lessons to help students tap into new sensations which they can later evaluate and use as information when moving forward. Most importantly, I encourage two-

way conversation and never look for “right” answers from students—only observations and questions which we can then explore.

We are singers 24/7, so it's impossible to separate the voice from the person. I carefully consider a student's emotional and physical state when they come for a lesson, even before they begin to sing. I view my students as complete artists and take care to address factors which may contribute to or inhibit mental, physical, and vocal well-being—all of which are intertwined.

I'm committed to considering my students' goals and will work with them to choose repertoire that is in line with those goals. I encourage my students to sing as wide a variety of repertoire as possible to foster technical growth and stimulate curiosity. Cross-training enriches our technique, widens our artistic palette, and makes us well-rounded musicians. I require that students research the historical and dramatic context of their music, which then allows them a sense of ownership over their vocal and artistic choices. Intellectual preparation and healthy, functional technique allow for freedom and spontaneity in performance. This combination also allows us to sing not only with great confidence, but also with great joy.

I tell the singers in my studio that we are like archaeologists excavating an ancient civilization. All our vocal and artistic potential already exists within us, but very often it is hidden by years of habits, insecurities, or misinformation, just as a prehistoric site might be covered by layers of packed soil and rock. With great patience, discipline, curiosity, kindness, and excitement, we must brush away the ineffective patterns to reveal the magnificent instrument underneath. Thus, singing is constant, wondrous discovery.