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To make music is to create sounds in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony and expression of emotion. Being able to create music is a “superpower” that is available to all of humankind. The act of expressing oneself with one’s voice through song is one of the most cathartic and powerful experiences a human being can have. My job as a voice teacher is to help others find a closer relationship with this “superpower”.

Having a safe space to experiment is imperative for vocal growth. To do this, I give my vocalists the necessary tools to become independent artists, free to express and to troubleshoot their own instruments and not be afraid to take interpretative risks. In my voice studio, students are encouraged to fail, and sometimes I even require it as part of the learning process. Students who are not afraid to make “wrong” sounds are much more courageous in attempting to make the “right” ones.

The first tool I use to foment independence in my studio is to encourage kinesthetic awareness on the processes of singing. Requiring the student to verbalize the sensations they feel while singing with adequate airflow, articulators that are free to move and pronounce text clearly, and recreating adequate faryngeal space to take pressure off the larynx, helps them develop their own vocabulary as they continue to understand vocal technique. Asking them to explain what they feel helps them develop independence and confidence when talking about their instrument. Verbalizing these physical sensations also develops the skill of internalizing information, so when they are in a collaborative environment with a coach or conductor, they will be able to translate the advice to fit their needs and vocal goals.

I instill autonomy in my students when tailoring vocal warm-ups and vocal exercises to their individual needs. At the beginning of each student's journey, I use warm-ups that have been devised by W. Stephen Smith in his book *The Naked Voice: A Wholistic Approach to Singing*. The series of warm-ups address registration, airflow, chiaroscuro and onsets in a variety of ways. I find that they set up the student well to achieve a free tone. Later in their development, I explain to the students how to change the vocal warm-up to fit the technical challenges they find in their repertoire. This

provides the student with a systematic way of addressing technical issues, making it easier for them to understand and repeat when they are in solitary practice.

Another way I encourage independence is by emphasizing the importance of research. I believe this is one of the most important aspects of being an independent performer, and I treat it as such in my studio. I require them to gather information about the composer and librettist, to develop a character, to find pronunciation and diction resources to aid with the text of a foreign language, and as mentioned above, to have them devise warm-ups to fit their repertoire needs. I even ask them to show me their vocal warm-up routine at the piano. This allows them to take the reins of interpretation and make them feel empowered and confident when speaking about their voice and repertoire.

My methods of teaching work well for singers on any level of skill. I can attest by my experience of working on an array of music genres and languages, from classical, Golden Age musical theater, modern musical theater, jazz and popular music genres that these concepts produce great results for the many priorities that a diverse student population requires. . The only criteria for acceptance in my studio is simply that students come willing to try new things, take risks, do the work, and stay committed to their journey as a vocalist.