

Leanne Brooker MUSIC STUDIO

Piano & Voice

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Pondering the program

Dear Shelli

RE: 2018 Bursary recipient report

I would like to say a huge thank you to you and your national team, along with the Qld chapter of ANATS, for generously providing me with a bursary which contributed to my cost of attending the 2018 National RESONATE Conference held in the Blue Mountains earlier this month.

As you can imagine, I was absolutely overwhelmed by the choices presented to me in the program, and spent quite some time pondering all the choices before settling on which sessions to attend. Below is a summary of my experience on each day of the conference, and the key things I have learned.

Conference Day 1:

After a day of traveling on planes, buses and automobiles, I arrived in the cold and misty Blue Mountains to find a very warm greeting from the ANATS committee members in the



Katerini, Victoria, and myself on the last day.

grand foyer of the Fairmont Resort. I wandered down to the welcome reception with a little nervousness, but much anticipation of meeting some voice experts, and perhaps a few teachers just like me – hungry to learn and be better at our craft. I accepted a glass of wine, and within seconds, met some very lovely conference delegates – Katerini, and Victoria – who also happened to be bursary recipients.

Conference Day 2:

After a lovely morning meditation with Veronica Stewart-Monro, I attended the keynote presentations on what it means to sing (Brian Gill) and what it means to teach (David Sisco). Both presentations were inspirational, and I managed to fill a whole notebook with ideas, and a list of further reading and research topics to pursue.



Keynote Brian Gill, and me.

I opted for the 'Singing and teaching across styles' panel for the first afternoon session, as I am called upon to teach all sorts of styles in my teaching role. The session was extremely relevant to my experience as a singing teacher in a regional area, and it was comforting to realise that the basics of technique – ie. airflow, understanding anatomy, resonators, articulators etc. is equally relevant in all styles of singing. It is a huge comfort to know that vocal health is the central focus for all singing, regardless of style. Vocal health is something that I maintain as a high priority in my teaching practice, and it is comforting to know this is backed up by the experts, and those at the top of the voice pedagogy field.

For the last session of the day, I chose the 'voice science' presentation with Brian Gill, and was blown away by his understanding of harmonics and formants, the software available to analyse the voice, and how this can be interpreted and applied to voice teaching.

Overall, the things that resonated with me on the first full day of the ANATS Conference, in my own words, were:

1. When we are courageous to show our vulnerabilities, are constantly curious, and open to making mistakes, we are the best teachers.
2. Collaboration and tapping into the specialised knowledge of our peers benefits students exponentially. It takes a village to raise a musician.
3. The latest in vocal science is worth learning and incorporating into our teaching to ensure students are developing the most effective technical habits for the long term.
4. Interesting thought from David Sisco: "If you don't enjoy a particular genre of music or style, maybe you just haven't invested enough time to develop an appreciation of it."

Conference Day 3:

I attended three very interesting sessions on teaching young voices with Kelly Pecina, Wendy Rolls, and Christina Gronborg, and added to my 'to do' list of further reading and research. I gained new knowledge on the influence of puberty on adolescent female voices, and some ideas on repertoire that is most suitable for the female voice in this stage of their development.

Later that morning, I was drawn to the Contemporary Masterclass with Brian Gill. In my experience, all vocal students want to sing contemporary repertoire at some stage. I don't discourage this, as I believe that enjoyment and passion should always be at the heart of anyone's participation in making music. Here, I picked up some new exercises and technique tips to use in lessons. For example:

1. The 'nose pinch' to build resonance, and place the voice more forward.
2. Use all breath in the breath cycle (don't stack breath).
3. Find your unique sound – avoid imitation.
4. Voice doesn't have to sound, or be, challenging to be beautiful/soulful.
5. Smile/lip trill – move the air consistently.
6. 'Colour' the sound.
7. Resistance breath – breathe in with finger in front of lips.
8. Resonance – ooh buzz on hand (fist side).
9. Hands beside mouth – to encourage forward tone.
10. Lip buzz (hold nose) – achieve greater resonance.
11. Nose pinch – 'hee' pressure at tongue.
12. Pinky between teeth/blow raspberry – maintain consistent airflow.

After a stunning lunch, I attended the session appropriately titled 'Addressing The Elephant in the room – Belting'. The topic stood out to me as a 'must attend', as I have always avoided teaching belting due to a lack of certainty that it is safe for young voices to make this their predominant technique. I have been in the 'all belting is bad' camp, to some degree. I have been aware that many singers have maintained long and successful careers on healthy belting, without the need to visit the laryngeal surgeon, but I'm also aware of some very high profile singers who have had to go 'under the knife' to remove nodes to continue their singing careers, and to ensure they don't lose their voices completely.

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The panel gave me confidence that the same techniques can be applied to belting as for classical, musical theatre, jazz, contemporary, or any other type of singing, and that an awareness and understanding of the 'closure quotient' is useful (more reading added to my list!). Encouraging student awareness of how a damaged voice sounds and feels compared with a healthy one is important, while ensuring that if any signs of vocal damage exist, and if there is any concern, the student is referred to a specialist for further investigation. Some of the key points I noted from this session were:

1. There are many different definitions of what it means to 'belt'.
2. More accurately, most singers would have a mixed belt (some head voice, some belt).
3. Biggest risk to vocal cords is mimicking other singers – ie. Manipulating voice to sound like someone else.
4. Interesting concept – every voice has a 'budget'. Some techniques 'cost' more than others (eg. Use of vocal effects). Some will fatigue the voice. Every voice is finite.
5. Heavy vocal load predisposes you to damage, regardless of your technique.

I didn't want to miss the session on 'Young male voices in transition', so slipped out at the end of the belting session to hear Theresa Rayner's principles that underpin her teaching of adolescent boys. The tips I picked up included:

1. Never force the voice beyond present capacity during transition.
2. The idea of the singing athlete – muscle tone strength, agility, endurance, muscle memory.
3. Laugh - release tension.
4. Get acquainted with breath at very first lesson.
5. Teach body to support sound – even in playground (don't shout with throat).
6. Listen to tone of speaking voice– where is it sitting?
7. Diction – using muscles in face.
8. Warmups – include whole body.



The beautiful view from the foyer of Fairmont Resort.

The Musical Theatre Masterclass with David Sisco was at the top of my list for the whole conference. I am currently Vocal Coach for our community musical here in Gladstone (*Anything Goes*), and many of my students are involved in the combined schools musicals which are produced every two years. Ensuring amateur performers build and maintain healthy technique is really important to me, and of course important for performers' vocal endurance throughout a rigorous rehearsal and performance schedule. Some of the new exercises I picked up from David, included:



Keynote David Sisco, and me.

1. Achieving a consistent airflow throughout each phrase - alternate 'hiss' with lyric phrase.
2. Bringing voice forward – 'nasal plug' (with 5 note descending scales)
3. Character/connection with audience: numbers 1 = sing to self, 2 = sing to other character, 3 = sing to audience. More connected and spontaneous (may change each time you perform).
4. Take down 'scaffolding' – it's about the audience's emotion. Trust the lyrics.
5. Relaxed jaw and tongue – 'ngair ngair'



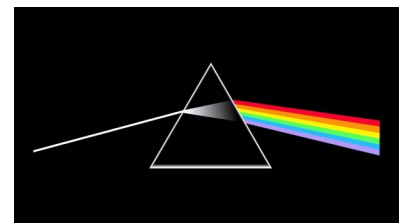
David, Katerini, myself, and Kelly at the Masquerade Ball.

After two full days of brain overload, the Masquerade Ball came at just the right time for everyone to let their hair down. The photo booth was a hit, as was the dance floor late into the evening. It was a fantastic night – beautiful food, great people, and fun entertainment.

Conference Day 4:

After an energising vocal warm-up session with Marisa Lee Naismith on Sunday morning, I attended David Sisco's 'Musical Theatre – Then and Now' presentation. I loved hearing the history of musical theatre from David's perspective, along with the debunking of myths relating to musical theatre shows in the modern age. The advice I took from this session for teachers included:

1. Know the repertoire – including range and tessitura.
2. Teach a healthy technical approach – teach mixed voice.
3. How to sustain a career in musical theatre – combine complementary careers, encourage students to develop a 'portfolio of gifts' ie. a working artist, take business classes, ask former students for advice.
4. The prism – white light is breath, colours are the style.



The prism

The final session I attended was a panel on the classical voice; significance, inspiration and currency. I was interested to hear about the pedagogy of voice at a postgraduate level, and the panellists' advice to students applying for performing arts places at university. I took copious notes, as I have a few students who want to pursue careers in performing arts. After the session, I was fortunate to have a short conversation with Margaret Schindler, Head of Vocal Studies at Queensland Conservatorium, who shared very generously about some of her teaching experiences.

I have already met with three of my vocal teaching colleagues here in Gladstone, plus two trainee teachers who I am mentoring, to share my excitement and new ideas from the conference. I aim to bring my colleagues together on a more regular basis to share our experiences in vocal teaching, and am encouraging them all to become ANATS members, too.

Thank you once again to ANATS for this wonderful opportunity. One day, I hope to be an expert in a specialist topic and perhaps present at one of the conferences myself. I hope to see you all in Adelaide in two years!

Yours sincerely,

Leanne Brooker

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