

A personal story  
By Sarah Leaver  
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When I first learned that the Resonate conference was scheduled for my home state, I knew I had to attend. I was searching for two things: inspiration and knowledge. In my two previous and careers unrelated to singing, attendance at conferences always resulted in significant professional development beyond what I learned at university, and in new knowledge that I could immediately use. I was hoping to find it again.

Since joining ANATS six years earlier, I had not been able to afford to attend any ANATS events or to attend a conference. Feeling unsure as an emerging teacher with some formal music education, but with plenty of lived experience as a performer, musician and teacher, I needed to know if I was on the right track as a teacher of singing. In trepidation, I applied for and received an amount of financial help.

My experience of Resonate was deeply personal. On the first day I listened to David Sisco open his heart to us about what it means to teach. In that first morning, I wept silently as my overwhelming sense of being an imposter was revealed. The main reason I was here, was now apparent: I needed to believe in myself again. I had studied for my flight instructor rating at age 18, and at twenty was teaching flying students. Being so young during my training ingrained within me the ability to observe a student's body, responses and behaviours, as well as my own, in intense situations. I had learned how to interact with individuals in my later work as a corporate communications officer, and in post graduate studies was drawn to examining how people and organisations communicate. Despite this, I had fallen into the mind trap of thinking I had nothing to offer the student of singing. I was ready to give it all up. Until I heard David remind us of the role of the teacher.

In that "ah-ha" moment, I realised I was already in possession of many skills. Two pennies dropped. I had always been drawn to communication. Singing and performing is not only my creative communication tool, so is teaching it. Perhaps I dared to believe in myself?

At Resonate I met many teachers who had studied vocal pedagogy, held tertiary music qualifications, and presented PhD research papers. At first I felt unworthy, and as David had described in his speech, the sense of being an imposter nearly overwhelmed me on the first day. Gradually I found the confidence to talk to teachers over coffee and lunch. It was that or stand alone on the edges, fiddling my phone for consolation, and pretending I was not nervous and ready to flee.

In talking to others and listening to presentations, I learned that the act of teaching is imperfect, as much as the act of singing itself. As long as I have the desire and ability to keep learning, growing and trying new ideas, I will have something positive to contribute to others. Those helpful and lovely people I spoke to, both attendees and presenters, made it clear that they all started somewhere too.

Since returning home, I have renewed a commitment to myself to work things out in my own voice, to try new styles and techniques, strengthen my aging voice, and be open minded to new ways of teaching, based on science, evidence, trial and intuition. In connecting with other teachers, I was excited to meet two who are only two hours drive from my rural location, who have already been of great help. I had been operating in a vacuum.

I am looking into additional studies. I am particularly keen on returning to my old university and extending my Graduate studies to the Master in Communication. Communication through the singing voice was touched on in many conference presentations, and particularly inspires me. I am drawn once again to study speech problems and communication difficulties.

I do feel I am on a renewed journey of inspiration with my own singing, and what it is to teach, and to inspire and look after the young and older singers who come to me. It is an important job that I hold both personally and professionally. In my small town it is difficult to find professional networks, and hard to travel to attend ANATS events. Thanks to ANATS for holding a bi-ennial conference, and helping me to access Resonate, I have learned more about myself, what motivates me to sing and teach, and learned that there are resources available. All I need to do is dare to trust myself and step out and keep learning.

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