

TRANSITIONS: Re-evaluating Risk and Readiness

by Christin Coffee Rondeau

When are you ready—really ready—to begin your life's work? To take the step that you don't think you're ready to take right now because you think you don't have enough degrees, certifications, or experience?

When I graduated college, I did not feel like a real singer. I felt inept, stupid, scared. In my 21-year-old mind, I thought that a Master's degree was the fix to all those insecurities. At the time, most of the singers and teachers I respected had a minimum of a Master's, so I figured that was the way for me to feel like a respected singer too. My value would be irrefutable! I would finally have proof that I was a "real" musician.

A few years later, I found myself in southwest Ohio, standing on the steps of a music building, having just learned that I passed my orals (praise be, and thank you to my wonderful panel and advisors!). I took a deep breath, stopped shaking for the first time in a week, and thought, "I have a Master's now. This is it. I did it. I know the things. I have the letters....Christin Coffee Rondeau, MM. And I don't feel any different. Why am I not different?"

This torrent of self-doubt was followed by, "Well, obviously, this isn't enough training. I need a DMA or a PhD. Another degree—a bigger degree—will validate that I know what I'm doing, that I'm a decent singer, that I'm worthy of being a musician, that I can take myself seriously."

But a doctorate wasn't in the cards. My husband is active duty Air Force, and his next assignment was a fairly remote one, moving us to our third state (and second desert) in just four years of marriage. There wasn't a DMA program in sight. (Or, as we would often joke, "In the desert, there's a great doctoral program behind every tree.") I couldn't see it at the time, but this turned out to be a very good thing—a life-shaping thing, in fact. In that quiet season in yet another desert, I had very little to do other than read and ponder. I took a break from singing. I met some incredible mentors and role models. (Turns out, you can find them outside the singing world! Who knew?!) I made some meaningful friendships. I had some beautiful babies. And I learned some profoundly important things about life, family, and the kind of person I wanted to be.

I didn't get a DMA during those four years in the desert. I still don't have those letters and that piece of paper that

I thought would imbue value, knowledge, and worth. And yet, those years were some of the most transformative and empowering of my life. The most important thing I learned during that quiet desert season? No one and nothing but you can determine when you've "made it." When you're worthy of being taken seriously. When you know enough. When you're ready. Degrees can't do it. Teachers can't do it. Directors can't do it. It's entirely your choice.

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We often put off risks, opportunities, or even the choice to see ourselves as capable people with phrases like,

"Well, I just don't have enough training yet."

"When I get that next certification, I'll be ready to start my business."

"I need to do at least two more young artist programs before I even begin to think of myself as a serious musician."

"I'm not a professional...this is just a hobby for me...I don't really know what I'm doing."

"No one will pay that much for my services. I don't even have a [insert qualification here]."

"I'm only [25/35/45/etc.]. Who would take me seriously?!"

"I can't apply to teach there! I only have a [insert degree here]!"

My amazing teachers, coaches, professors, and mentors (not to mention friends and family!) have always been as honest and encouraging as they could possibly be. If I choose to see myself as less than, unprepared, ignorant, silly, unqualified—that is entirely on me. Why do we task other people, degrees, roles, certifications, titles, and academic positions with the enormous, deeply personal responsibility of making us take ourselves and our callings seriously? Only we can cultivate a sense of worth and readiness in ourselves. Only we can decide if what we have to offer is valid and whether or not we're ready to offer it.

continued: Re-evaluating Risk and Readiness

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So, I wonder—the things we feel unqualified to do—do we feel that way because we truly need to gain more information and clarity on how to move forward? If so, that's great. Get that information, gain that clarity. But, if you're like me, there's a good chance you're delaying because you don't trust yourself or think you're worthy. What if we're waiting on external validation when the work that actually needs to happen is all in our heads and hearts?

Maybe you're more ready than you think you are.
Maybe it's time to just risk that first step.



Christin Coffee Rondeau is a soprano, voice teacher, and co-founder of Sand Dollar Music in Dayton, Ohio. She is passionate about serving and empowering singers and independent voice teachers to do the work and art they love. Read more of her writing or get in touch by visiting www.sanddollarmusic.com.

15th Annual NewVoice Educators Symposium at Indiana University



Greetings from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana!

You are cordially invited to attend the [15th Annual New Voice Educators Symposium](#) on Friday and Saturday, February 15th and 16th, 2019, at Indiana University, Bloomington. The symposium, sponsored by Student N.A.T.S. at Indiana University, is designed to provide new and future voice teachers an opportunity to present an academic paper related to singing or teaching voice, and to network in a collaborative, professional, and friendly environment. Attendance at the symposium is open to teachers, students, and singers of all levels, but invitations to present are limited to those with five years or less of full-time, collegiate teaching experience.

We are pleased to welcome Dean Southern of the Cleveland Institute of Music as the keynote speaker. Dr. Southern will offer a presentation centered around African American singers.

The symposium is a free event but does not include travel expenses. If you are interested in presenting, please submit an abstract of your proposed presentation no later than **December 15, 2018**. Please include your name and title, email address, institutional affiliation (if applicable), and contact information with your submission. You will be sent an electronic confirmation of receipt of your abstract, and a notification once presentations have been selected. Please send abstracts, questions, and any other correspondence electronically to:

Whitney Hamblin
Vice President; Chairperson, New Voice Educators Symposium
Student N.A.T.S. at Indiana University
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We hope to see you in Bloomington in February!