

What We're Talking About: Student Performance Venues

by Cynthia Vaughn, Associate Editor, "Independent Voices"

One of the biggest challenges for most independent voice studios is the lack of a dedicated performing space for student concerts. When I had my first home studio, my solution was simply not to hold student recitals. After all, I rationalized, my students already had plenty of performing opportunities at school, church, community theater, and NATS Student Auditions. Right? And it takes a lot of time, money, and organization to coordinate a student recital, and who has time to bake cookies for the reception? Over the years, I have realized the importance and value of planning regular student recitals:

- 1) The busiest singers are often the ones most eager and prepared to sing on a student recital.
- 2) The least confident singers may have few other opportunities to experience singing in a safe, non-competitive environment. If they aren't ready to sing a solo, they may be comfortable singing a group song or duet.
- 3) Students get to hear other students and learn from each other.
- 4) Family and friends get to hear the progress students have made and see the value in the investment of voice lessons. This is especially important for parents of teen students, because most high school students admittedly avoid singing when their parents are at home!
- 5) And finally, the teacher gets to see how much progress her students have made and how they react under pressure. I have witnessed a few recital melt downs, but some of my students have surprised me by singing their very best when they have a captive audience.

Once I made the decision to offer student recitals, I needed to find spaces larger than my living room. In recent online forums, voice teachers shared their ideas for recital venues. The most common recital venues are local churches, which may offer recital space for a rental fee, donation, or no charge. However, many teachers like Shannon Coates prefer spaces that aren't church sanctuaries. "I'm always looking for alternatives!" The pros are that churches usually have good acoustics and a decent piano. The cons are that some students won't perform in churches for personal or religious reasons, and some repertoire (particularly music theater

and pop songs) isn't particularly appropriate in a house of worship. Laurel Shepherd prefers "a church sanctuary that is not too churchy. And I do pay for room rental."

Quite a few teachers hold their recitals in senior centers, where the recital doubles as entertainment for residents. Roberta De Fiore always holds student recitals at an elder care facility. "I teach them that if you have a talent, it is important to use it to give back."

Sofya Palma rents a school auditorium. "There is a nice one around with raised stage, new sound system and about 300 seats." Some colleges may allow alumni to use campus spaces. Kayla Bailey was able to book a beautiful recital hall at a discount, "including insurance, venue setup, and a tuned piano!"

Other suggestions include art galleries, black box theaters, private homes, and coffee shops. Katharine Randall brings a keyboard and sound equipment to coffee shop "gigs" that tend to be popular music (50s, 60s, 70s, etc) or Disney. "Many of my students accompany themselves on guitar, keyboard, ukulele, etc. Some of them prefer tracks. I wanted the students to feel like it was a "public" performance for strangers as well as family and friends. We have had a few people who stayed to listen and then wanted to find out if they could get our on mailing list to watch other performances or find out where else the students would be performing! I was not expecting that."

Patti Haak Barrow's biggest challenge is finding (and affording) a space large enough for seat 80+ audience members plus a reception area "and a tuned piano!" Other teachers choose to do smaller, more intimate recitals at their homes. Karen Merstik-Michaels is initiating "The Living Room Sessions", and Ellen Claire Wheat writes, "If I had a nice backyard, I would consider doing a recital back there."

Wherever you hold your student recital, expect to pay a fee for the venue. While some teachers have secured free spaces, most independent voice teachers pay anywhere from \$50-\$500 for recital venue rental. Anne Van Etten believes that "paying for a quality venue for students to perform is a necessary business expense." And don't forget to make sure that a tuned piano is part of the agreement. Some venues will charge extra to tune a piano before a concert!

continued: What We're Talking About: Student Performance Venues

For my own student recitals, I have typically used churches or a room at the local library. This summer, I expanded my studio to add a 900 square foot space that is a dedicated recital and workshop space. It has been a long time coming, but it gives me and my studio faculty our own 50-seat recital venue with a baby grand piano, and I have made it available to other local music teachers to rent at a deep discount for their student recitals. "The Listening Room" opened in June and we hosted four voice, piano, and violin student recitals that month for community NATS/MTNA member teachers!

If you are considering student recitals, start by asking your colleagues, local churches, schools, libraries, and senior centers. Explore out of the ordinary possibilities such as an art gallery, a planetarium, a coffee shop, a "salon recital" in a hair salon. I'd like to know what other creative spaces you have discovered. Post online at NATS Chat for Voice Teachers or other online forums, or send me a message at CynthiaVaughn@mac.com.

Oh, and about those post-recital reception cookies? I still don't bake them. Parents volunteer to bring cookies or I buy them from the bakery!

NATS Intern Program

2019 application deadline: December 15, 2018

If you are interested in contributing to the support of the NATS Intern Program, donations can be made through the [NATS Foundation](#) (NATS INTERN PROGRAM: Barbara Doscher Fund or James McKinney Fund).

If your school or facility would be interested in coordinating/hosting a future NATS Summer Intern Program, please contact pastpresident@nats.org for details and facility requirements.



chat

*Presented by Inside View Press
Hosted by Dr. Kari Ragan*

Mark your calendar for our
2018-2019 sessions:

Sunday, October 7

"The Evolving Singing Voice: Changes Across the Lifespan"
with Karen Brunssen

Co-sponsored by The Voice Foundation

Sunday, November 11

"Finding & Keeping Them: Studio Marketing & Student Retention"
with Cynthia Vaughn, Kelli Barham, & Christin Coffee Rondeau

Sunday, December 9

"Bel Canto Can Belto—Cross-Training for the 21st Century Singer"
with Mary Saunders Barton

Sunday, January 13

"Getting the Twang of it: Physiologic, Acoustic, and Perceptual Characteristics" with Chadley Ballantyne and Kerrie Obert

Sunday, February 10

"Mindful Voice: How Cognitive Science Informs Voice Teaching"
with Lynn Holding and Lynn Maxfield

Sunday, March 10

"The Special Psychoacoustics of the Singing Voice"
with Ian Howell

Sunday, April 14

"The more things change, the more they stay the same:
some thoughts on the current state of pedagogic practice"
with Scott McCoy

Sunday, May 5

"A conversation with Stephanie Blythe and Christine Brewer"
Co-sponsored by The Voice Foundation

NEW TIME! 6 pm PT, 7 pm MT, 8 pm CT, 9 pm ET
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