



Cynthia Vaughn with 2020 Interns CJ Greer, Sarah Bucher, and Sarah Folsom

## Leaving Disneyland

By Cynthia Vaughn

It's hard to process what an incredible, magical, immersive, inspiring, and possibly life-changing experience I had at Georgia Southern University as a master teacher for the 2020 NATS Professional Intern Program. (Postponed to 2021 due to Covid.) For many of us this was the first time in many months to travel on a plane, eat in a shared dining space with strangers, and most importantly to make music together live and in-person. That's some pretty trippy stuff after the year and a half we've just had!

I have been to Disney parks twice in my lifetime. The first time was a family trip to Anaheim, California when I was 12 years old and I don't remember much except pre-teen angst. The second time I visited a Disney park was during the 2012 NATS Conference in Orlando, Florida. My daughter Katy Vaughn had been invited to appear on a NATS panel about performing for cruise ships, along with casting directors for Disney and other cruise lines. Katy had just finished a 10-month main stage performer cruise contract on the Disney Dream and she had cast passes to Disney World. So we played hooky one conference day and spent the whole day at Disney World. I will never forget what it felt like to walk down Main Street at age 55 with my 25-year old grown up child, and experience Disney magic for the very first time. I was overcome with emotion and burst into tears of joy at first site of the iconic castle. My daughter cried with me and we immersed ourselves in the whole experience. We rode rides (not the scary ones because I'm a wimp), we saw the Tiki show and Pirates of the Caribbean,

we went on a Safari, and journeyed to space. We ate too much sugary, greasy food and I had the theme song to "It's a Small World" stuck in my head for days. We soaked up everything we could and it was exhausting and magical.

That's kind of how the NATS Professional Intern Program felt to me. I marveled at the scenic beauty of Georgia and genuine Southern hospitality. (I have never been Yes-Ma'amed so much in my life.) So many people planned, prepared, pivoted, and worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that we had a great experience. I was amazed at the incredible teaching and artistry of the early career NATS voice teachers and collaborative piano coaching interns. I immersed myself in masterclasses and presentations about voice science, vocal health, historic black singers, and a profoundly beautiful artists concert. I was excited to experience the wonderful teaching of my intern cohort, and so very proud to see the progress of their temporary students as the intern teachers grew in confidence, skill, and friendship. Twice, I got to share the stage with my intern colleagues, first in a delightfully different "sing what brings you joy" masterclass. The second week of the program I honored my late mentor by presenting an interactive pedagogy presentation, "Introduction to Meribeth



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Dayme's CoreSinging: A Joyful Approach to Singing and Voice Pedagogy." Along the way, I was able to meet and mingle with the other program participants—faculty, interns, and students—who were not in my assigned cohort. I laughed a lot, especially with my voice interns Sarah Bucher, C.J. Greer, Sarah Folsom and collaborative piano coaching interns Natalie Sherer and Qiao Zheng Goh. It was truly magical and I won't soon forget it.

As I write this, it is three days after leaving Disneyland, I mean NATS Intern Program. My East Coast to West Coast jet lag is waning. My suitcase is unpacked, but I still have some laundry to do while I answer about a billion non-urgent emails that I ignored while in Georgia. I have projects to dive into and some big life stuff to navigate. It would be easy to go back to the same routine and daily stresses, however, I am determined not to waste the wonder. I have started journaling again, writing down new ideas, practicing gratitude, walking daily, and taking care of my health.

I have read many posts from NATS colleagues who attended continuing education and training programs this summer, either virtually or in-person. Many of you came away with creative ideas, new skills, greater knowledge, and renewed human connection. After months of malaise, some of you came away

refreshed, motivated, and inspired—you remembered why we do what we do. "Disneyland" was great, but eventually we all have to go back to our real lives and teaching studios and figure out how to keep and share some of the magic. This summer we took

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"We are the music makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams;—  
World-losers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams:  
Yet we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems . . ."

—Excerpt by Arthor O'Shaughnessy

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far less for granted. It was a turning point for many and I can't wait to see what creativity you will unleash, what career choices you will make, what life and family choices you will make, and what books you will write, literally and metaphorically.

Cynthia Vaughn, June 6, 2021  
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## Riding the waves *(continued from page 4)*

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that everyone manage personal risk; use the recommended ventilation, room size, distancing, and length of sessions data to plan your work; and advocate for all possible to be vaccinated. Our joint statement, issued over the summer, has already been used effectively by some colleagues to advocate for safer working conditions. I am grateful for our partner organizations and the experts who have joined us this past year to keep us informed and armed with facts and science informed data. I also encourage you to join our #fighthefatigue campaign by sharing some of our social media images with your colleagues and students. Many of these are uplifting reminders about self-care as we continue to weather the ups and downs before us.

As the fall season begins, many of our chapters and regions are again facing the choice of holding live or virtual audition events. It is likely that we will see a mixture of modes this fall as leaders meet host venue requirements that may change with little notice. Fortunately, our systems are now prepared for an easy transition to virtual mode should the need arise. Please be patient with our volunteer leaders and also grateful for their service as they work tirelessly to create valuable feedback experiences for your students.

We hope to ride the wave to a return of live national events in January with the 2022 Winter Workshop in New York City on a theme of "Matters of Style." Very soon you also will be hearing about the 2022 NATS National Conference in Chicago. It promises to be an exciting event with more sessions than ever before as we come together in celebration of our profession. Stay tuned for the announcement of the exciting lineup.

Our success in these times, as always, is dependent on our dedicated and faithful members who have ridden the waves with us during this turbulent time. I have been gratified to read so many positive messages about how NATS supported you during this time, how it has been a lifeline of support, and how our community has come together to support one another. While our founders likely never envisioned a pandemic event of this magnitude that would impact our profession so profoundly, I am certain they envisioned a strong community of mutual support within our profession and would indeed be proud of the association we are today.

Keep the faith, and let's continue to ride the waves together. As always, if you have questions or comments, please reach out to me at [allen@nats.org](mailto:allen@nats.org)