

## Finding My Tribe

By Sheila Townsend

2016 Joan Frey Boytim Award Recipient

My affiliation with NATS began 15 years ago when I attended the local Singing Festival hosted by the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of NATS. I loved meeting other students and I loved the feedback of knowing that my teacher and I were on the right track. My fantastic teacher, Annelle Delfs, is now a colleague of mine and I operate an independent studio in California.

Over the past few years I've started to attend district and regional NATS events with my students. It has been a blast to attend these conferences and student auditions, but I was even more surprised and excited to learn that I had been selected for the Joan Frey Boytim Independent Teacher Award. I could finally participate in NATS on a national level. I was nervous and excited, but drained after a long year of trying to meet the demands of a growing studio, while performing and maintaining a happy marriage. I needed a chance to renew my love for teaching and my love for singing.

The workshops at the conference were absolutely amazing. I chose to go early to attend the pre-conference Pop/Rock Vocalism for the Musical Theater Singer workshop, and I'm really glad that I did. I teach all genres of music to various students in my studio, and I'm already starting to integrate lessons from the Pop/Rock workshop into my teaching. Another workshop that was incredibly informative was the Processing New Repertoire for Permanence with Warren Jones. Students (and myself) are constantly having to learn and memorize new pieces of music, whether it's for college auditions, master classes, professional auditions, or recitals. Memorization is a big area of work (I'm very dyslexic,) and having these new ideas and



Sheila Townsend (left) with Joan Frey Boytim during the 54th National Conference in Chicago.

methods for helping to memorize songs is fantastic, especially with art songs! I could go on and on about the different presentations and events. I learned so much from the conference speakers and workshops, I've already purchased straws to do SOVT exercises with my students and I've started planning and brainstorming about ways to expand my studio into a multi-teacher studio! Wow!

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One of my favorite things about the conference was the ability to meet and learn from all of my fellow teachers! I spent an afternoon out with the other Boytim Award recipients, and that time was one of the highlights of the conference. We shared thoughts and experiences, ideas and insights, and even a few frustrations and horror stories (I think all teachers have a few of these up their sleeves). These other teachers were a joy to spend time with, and

## continued: Finding My Tribe

since we are all independent teachers, we had so much in common. It may sound cliché, but I really feel like I found my tribe with these teachers. I've already created a Facebook page for this group so that we can stay in touch. I now have a small network of really awesome independent teachers that are doing great things across the country. Having the flexibility to really talk about the nitty-gritty of everyday life and challenges that are associated with being an independent teacher has been a game changer.

For me personally, the conference was a chance to expand my horizons when it comes to vocal pedagogy and vocal technique. It was very humbling, but also very inspiring to realize that there is SO much more to learn about the human voice! I have thought several times over the past few years about going back to school for graduate school, and yet again, the opportunities to network and talk to people who have experience in this area or represent schools was invaluable. After being exposed to all the knowledge and learning opportunities at the conference, I've decided to apply to the NATS intern program and I'm seriously considering Shenandoah University's CCM program so that I can continue to learn and grow. I left California feeling quite run down and exhausted. I returned feeling excited and joyful about future opportunities to grow as a teacher and vocalist.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to go Chicago for this event. I'm so incredibly grateful, I couldn't have attended without this award and I'm so thankful for the chance I had to network, learn, and to be so refreshed and invigorated by the entire experience. The honor of receiving this award has really increased my level of confidence and pride in being an independent teacher. Before, I occasionally felt like I was less than others because I wasn't a university teacher. Now I'm very confident and proud of the work that I'm doing and the programs that I'm developing as an independent teacher. I felt like a resource to other teachers.

Thank you so much, Joan Frey Boytim. It was such an incredible honor to meet you in person, but in a strange way, it was like meeting an old friend.

You've been with me my entire career and nearly every day in my studio. I loved the "Private Voice Studio Handbook" and it gave me the confidence I needed to quit seven part time music teaching jobs and focus all my energy on building my little studio with just six young teens. My studio is now over 50 students. My students sing with healthy, strong voices and it's because I've integrated the art song repertoire from "First Book of Soprano/Mezzo/Tenor/Bass Solos" books. I cannot wait to delve into the new repertoire you suggested with those recital programs! What a treat! The conference was such a wonderful experience and I'm already saving up for Las Vegas. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the huge role you've played in my life and my student's lives.

Sincerely,  
Sheila Townsend  
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### Joan Frey Boytim Award for Independent Teachers

In Summer 2015, the NATS Foundation announced a new opportunity for independent teachers. Thanks to a significant gift from Joan Frey Boytim, the Foundation awarded \$1,000 to one NATS member from each of the 14 NATS regions to attend the 2016 NATS National Conference in Chicago last July. The award is designed to recognize and support independent teachers who do not hold full or part-time teaching positions in a college or university. Recipients of the Joan Frey Boytim Award:

- \* Must be a NATS member in good standing at the time of application and time of conference
- \* Must never before have attended a NATS National Conference
- \* Must teach at least five private students per week
- \* Must not work for a college or university as a voice instructor
- \* Must write an essay about their conference experience

Learn more at [nats.org](http://nats.org).