



Meet Heidi Skok, Music Faculty

Interview by Susan Beck, Volunteer and FCA Alumni (Thank you Susan!)

Mezzo-soprano and Master vocal technician Heidi Skok teaches voice at Fairmount Center and runs a teen theater and acting class at the Center. She was raised in Lake County and graduated with a BFA in Vocal Performance from Carnegie Mellon University. She sang for twelve years with the Metropolitan Opera as a Solo Artist and was a Young Artist in the MET program.

Heidi teaches singers who perform in major opera houses around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, as well as on Broadway and in recording studios. She also offers a program for high school voices and helps talented young voices. Heidi is the founder and Artistic Director of Resonanz Opera, which attracts operatic talent from all over the country.

We chatted with Heidi about her career and about singing.

When did you realize you had a good voice?

I would sing to all of the animals in the barn when I was four years old. I always sang along to the radio and would do so in the same key as the song. I learned early on that I had perfect pitch. I started to take lessons when I was 12.

What are your strengths as a singer?

I've always had great pitch and I am a very good technical singer. I started off belting pop and Broadway song as a kid, and then one of my early teachers taught me "head voice." That opened the door for me to classical music and I became quite good at it. When I learned head voice, I gained higher notes so people thought I was a soprano. I followed that track for 20 years, but it was not the right fit for me. In 2006, I switched back to my lower voice and have had even better success than I did as a soprano. It's never too late to do the right thing!

What is the strangest or funniest thing you've experienced while you were performing?

I sang on stage with Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and many other big opera stars. I learned so much watching them work when I was just a young artist at the MET. Kathy Battle did not like to be touched while on stage and I made the mistake of grabbing her arm! Ha! Placido Domingo would study his lines back stage between entrances. Pavarotti needed little steps between the big steps behind the stage. He was a big man.

How do you help people struggling with voice problems?

I like helping people with voice problems because I have overcome problems myself. I have had voice problems twice, which led me to go back to singing as a mezzo-soprano. I see many singers who have nodes and I am knowledgeable about them. Everyone can overcome their voice problems by learning correct technique. If you have nodes, or another problem, it does NOT mean you are a bad singer. It just means you are not using the best possible function for your voice, and you can correct this.

Do you have a favorite pop singer?

I teach a lot pop singers, but I don't really care for the vocal techniques of most of today's famous singers, except for Lady Gaga. She was trained classically and you can tell. She sings with great connection to her chest and with lots of line and isn't breathy. I tend to like pop singers of the past --

Whitney Houston was just the best in every way. I also like Annie Lennox, Michael Jackson and Celine Dion to name a few.

Who do you admire as a classical singer?

I always loved Luciano Pavarotti. His technique was so easy and he sang from his core breath support. The sound was so sweet and so beautiful. I miss him.

What other pastimes do you enjoy?

When I can find time, I like to read and run. I LOVE weightlifting--that's quite a passion of mine. I like to eat clean and learn new recipes and I love to spend time with my four teenage children and my mate and business partner, Jim.

Fairmount Center for the Arts fosters a love for the arts in a noncompetitive environment for Northeast Ohioans – from preschoolers to senior citizens – as a gateway to exploration and personal development for all of our citizens and residents.