

“Dave’s Gone By”

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Radio Interviews by English professor Dave Lefkowitz on his radio show broadcast from the University of Northern Colorado (UNC).

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Dave Lefkowitz: We’re talking with Barbara J. Simon, the author of the book *Singing Body and Soul*. So, have any of your students gone on, if not to fame, then to some Broadway roles or some notoriety?

Barbara J. Simon: They have, you know it’s interesting. I always say that I teach musical theater, and all my students work on musical theater songs, because it’s such a strong foundation. But I’ve had the amazing experience of having so many of my students take this training into and go off into another genre. So I have a student who is an Americana singer who has a band who is releasing his first singer/ songwriter CD next weekend.

DL: Oh Mazel.

BJS: I have a student who sang an R&B song on the Oprah Winfrey show and has a long career in house music. And I have an a cappella singer who is doing a concert tomorrow night with his college a cappella group. And he’s won several national awards as an a cappella singer. And I have a rock singer who has put out his third CD with his rock band and they tour around. But none of them have been on Broadway.

DL: That’s interesting because they seem like very different kinds of singing.

BJS: I’m not teaching them how to sound. I’m teaching them how their own larynx works. And then to take their personality, and the things that move them in their heart, and the music that makes them, you know, jump up in the air. That’s what they should be singing. They shouldn’t be singing what I’m singing.

DL: Speaking of great. You know one of the more important musical theater writers of our time. A fellow who was involved with his writing partner Lynn Ahrens, in *Once on this Island*, and they did *Ragtime*, and they did a couple of other shows. I’m talking about Stephen Flaherty. How do you know this person?

BJJ: Well you know when I was at NYU, the head of our musical theater department was Grover Dale, who was a choreographer and director on Broadway. He sent us all to his wife's voice teacher. This is the man that I dedicated my book to, Joseph Scott. At the time I was that studying with him, he had three singers who had Tony nominations all within one year. I went to his class every week. Steve Flaherty was one of the accompanists for the class. We just hit it off. We just became friends. And we've been friends ever since.

DL: Let me ask you about different kinds of voices. Why is it that, we consider – it's a Centenarian. . in just a week or two, it would have been Frank Sinatra's hundredth Birthday. What is it about his voice?

BJJ: Part of it has to do with the shape of the vocal cords. It's just like if you look at a dancer or a gymnast, people's bodies just have different proportions to them. It has to do with the actual shape that you're born with. And he was born with just the right shape vocal cords. He used them very well. He used them very skillfully. But it also had to do with his thinking, and the way he approached a song, and his understanding of the song. How he could get his emotion into the flesh of the cords. That's why I always say that singing is a matter of spirit entering into flesh, and that's a magical thing. It's amazing, and it's a part of what we live for as humans. He had that one down. He really knew how to make the feelings and emotions of the song a part of the actual process of the cords moving. And it's gorgeous.

DL: Last question for you. If you could boil down the most important thing in the book, or about singing and music in general, what would it be?

BJJ: That you need to sing from your heart, and that's more important than the sound. And if you do that, it can lead the sound to getting better. And that's a good thing. But you really need to sing what you feel and what you mean, and what your view of the world is, and really stick to that.

DL: Well, I think that's great advice even for someone who can't sing, like yours truly here. Delightful to talk with Barbara J. Simon. I wish you many, many more students, and many sales of this really good book. And the joy, the continued joy, in vocalizing.

BJJ: Thank you so much

DL: Shalom to you

BJJ: Bye.