



Roberta Cunningham leads a morning body work session including yoga and qi gong.

Vocal Recovery and Discovery in Germany

Due to SAI's generosity in awarding me a Summer Music Scholarship for 2022,

I found myself unexpectedly rejuvenated at the conclusion of Roberta Cunningham's Summer Course for Solo Singers in Coesfeld, Germany. Going into the experience in Germany for the first time, I was expecting a hyper-competitive performance environment like I have experienced in the past elsewhere; imagine my elation when I not only found myself in an unconditionally supportive environment of recovery and discovery, but also one where I was accepted into a group of longtime friends.

Roberta's course was structured in such a way that each singer (of which there were less than fifteen) had the opportunity to participate in four masterclasses, two public concerts, and receive four coachings and two technical lessons. While I presented pieces by Lili Boulanger, Jules Massenet, Libby Larsen, and Andre Previn (performing Massenet and Larsen for the public), it was also a privilege to be able to observe all the vocalists' masterclasses as well. I found that the faculty, Roberta Cunningham and Rayanne Dupuis, were able to teach essential techniques (i.e., releasing the pelvic floor and

their explanation of an "open throat") in a way that was new and automatically engaging to me. Each day began with instruction and practice re-aligning our bodies and engaging them for singing from pelvis to head. Whether inside the education center or on the grass of the lawn in the morning, beginning the day with loving what my body can do for my voice and teaching it to serve me well brought a grounding and calm energy to my music-making that has been difficult for me to achieve in the past. This in turn taught me to be comfortable and enthusiastic about communicating with an audience through characters and their songs—such as the women I performed, including Massenet's *Manon*, briefly Blanche DuBois, and the Tudor queens Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard. Bonnie Wagner, my coach, fostered an energetically creative environment to also expand my communicative artistry with these songs.

Another highlight of the program for me was the diversity of repertoire which singers presented. We had total freedom over what music we brought. Other singers presented Puccini, Joni Mitchell, Stephen Schwartz, Handel, Mozart, and many others. Hearing and seeing Roberta instruct in so many genres has hugely influenced my own teaching. Since returning

from Germany, I have acquired 20 students of my own with *Voice by Chelsea*; the vast majority of them are interested in singing commercial music and because of the musical interactions I witnessed and experienced in Coesfeld, my ability to communicate those stylistic techniques after building a classically informed background for myself has vastly improved. However, during my time at the workshop, I did my best to highlight repertoire that was fairly new for the community. Most of what I brought was material from my graduate recital at which I chose to highlight several women composers and subjects, and I was grateful to the workshop for giving me the autonomy to choose how to amplify these womens' voices.

Unlike the full remainder of the other participants, I had little knowledge of the environment of the workshop and I think that its location is particularly noteworthy. The Kolping-Bildungstatts, where all the non-locals were housed, is a repurposed and remodeled mansion equipped with housing, music, and dining amenities that frequently hosts educational programs of all sorts. Other programs that overlapped with ours included one for young children and an adult workshop for accordion players! Within walking distance



After the final concert at the Kolping-Bildungsstätte.
From left, top row: Andrew Young, Karen Ingrid, Sky Ingram, Jan Vorrath, Andrej Hovrin, Catherine Lupien, Roberta Cunningham, Rayanne Dupuis, Alexandra Schoo, David Hardt, Sascha Tombult. From left, front row: Antje Vass, Donna Lee, Bonnie Wagner, Susanne Pollmeier, Amy Steggles.

to the house is a performing space on a river, much like a lawn concert or small amphitheater. While we had a sizable audience congregating before the first concert began, it was wonderful to see town passersbys stopping on the bridge partway through, listening to a few songs, and going on their way. This audience was younger, mostly families and siblings, and it allowed us to contribute to the necessary goal of making our art accessible and creative in its presentation. The second and final concert, held outside at the Kolping, had much the same audience as the first. Many of the attendees have been supporting Roberta's singers in this setting for over 20 years, and I loved getting to introduce some contemporary American art song to an audience that was slightly unfamiliar with it.

I would like to finish my story by telling a bit about the lovely singers I was able to get to know over the course of the week. While several participants were opera performers and have been for many years, the range of backgrounds present was much more diverse than that. Several speech therapists were in attendance, as well as a professional waiter, a software engineer, an acting coach, and a local politician. Roberta's roommate, Andrew, attended for vocal

rehabilitation purposes. Throughout the week, two of the singers (Karen and Susanne) gave lectures and masterclasses in their own fields (semi-occluded vocal phonation and acting respectively). This milieu of attendees hailing from Canada to Norway was united in their having worked with Roberta for fifteen-plus years, reconvening annually throughout many stages of their lives. I, however, found the workshop on the popular-to-singers website YAPTracker, after it was publicized online for the first time by another participant, Amy. Witnessing the group's trust in each other, despite faltering moments and particularly in moments of success, helped motivate my bravery in trusting new techniques and respecting myself as a new professional with meaningful things to give.

I have already expressed my interest to Roberta in attending her workshop once more next July. Waking up to sit in my window preparing for the day, attending outside breakfast with the teachers, pianists, and participants sharing collegial and personal experiences, absorbing expertise with as much sponge-like tenacity as I could, performing with other singers for audiences who projected onto us so much love and engagement, and ending the day once

again sitting in my window after long discussions about the contemporary industry and how to thrive in it in the garden below was an experience that, prior to beginning it, I didn't believe existed or that I could deserve. During it, following it, and because of it, though, I feel frequent artistic fulfilment not only through performing but also through teaching. Without the generous funding from SAI Philanthropies, Inc., I may not have been able to make my journey to a place of such healing, growth, and friendship, and it is a privilege to share even a snippet of this time with you all, my sisters.

Catherine Lupien recently graduated with her M.M. in Voice Performance from UNC Greensboro, and prior to that graduated magna cum laude from Shenandoah Conservatory with a B.M. in Voice Performance. She was affiliated with UNCG's Kappa Gamma chapter and Shenandoah's Gamma Gamma chapter, and currently works as a church singer, accompanist, and Associate Voice Teacher for the remote company Voice by Chelsea.

