

Artist Enclave Interview - Jennifer Logan

by Brian Lynch

When and why did you start playing?

I began studying voice in 1997 at Gibbs High School's Pinellas County Center for the Arts, and studied piano as part of my voice training curriculum. I studied voice all the way through college, at the University of Colorado and at USF. I chose music because I actually grew up in ballet, and I was unable to dance on pointe due to an injury in my ankle, so I transitioned to the next thing I loved doing, which was singing. My mom and I loved going to musicals and orchestra concerts when I was young, so I was always drawn to music.

Are there other musicians in your family?

My mother was trained as a classical pianist, so I grew up hearing her play all the beautiful, familiar piano pieces from her years of study. I also have two cousins who are talented actresses and singers.

Who was your first teacher? Other teachers?

The teachers who most impacted my music path were David Pate, Frank Knight, and Bob Drick. They were all on the faculty at Gibbs. Pate was my jazz band teacher and has continued to be a friend and mentor; Frank Knight was my music theory teacher, and instilled in me a love of the technical aspect of music; Bob Drick was my choral conductor and helped me appreciate hard work and self-discipline.

Do you perform in public? Please describe those occasions?

I do! I sometimes play solo, just me and my piano and my voice. I have played at some of St. Pete's best music and arts establishments, from the Ale & the Witch to the Hideaway Cafe. I have been in a few bands that performed various styles of music, and right now I am singing with a band called Skully with some great musicians!

How do you handle mistakes during a performance?

Something I teach my students to do is to KEEP GOING. If you stop and freak out in front of everyone, you just drew attention to the mistake, and everyone will know. But if you keep going, most of the time folks think you know what you're doing and they often don't realize the mistake, or in the overall context of the piece the mistake becomes less significant. Also, sometimes if I crash and burn, I simply laugh and do my best to begin again where I left off. Not the most conventional method, but I am not always a conventional musician or teacher.

Do you get nervous before a performance?

Almost always, but the venue and material are a big part of that too. Being prepared is key! If I know what I am doing then I typically don't feel the nerves. It's when I am unprepared or underprepared that it can eat away at me. I also have a funny thing about singing or playing in front of people I am really close to. I don't know why! Give me a crowd of strangers and I am fine!

What advice would you give to beginners who are nervous?

I coach my students to take deep breaths, and remember they are the ones who have the courage to get up and perform and the audience will be impressed no matter what. I try to center my thoughts on my first few words of the song, or the first few notes I am playing, just so I have a place to channel that energy. Sometimes it is helpful to have a spot on the wall above everyone's head to look at; that way your audience can see your eyes, but you don't actually have to make eye contact. Or, I choose someone in the crowd who looks benign and make them my main focus.

How often and for how long do you practice?

chuckles Well, that is all dependent on how busy I am! I try to practice every day, but my dedicated practice is usually on the weekends, for a few hours at a time. And believe me, time flies when you sit down at the piano and really dig in. I don't time it. I practice til something sounds the way it needs to. I coach my students to do the same.

What do you practice - exercises, studies, hard passages, etc.?

I always warm up, whether I am practicing voice or piano. Warm ups prevent injury to the voice, by stretching and waking up the muscles, and help the voice stay elastic while you sing. Same goes for the fingers when playing: I actually stretch my hands, shoulders, arms, even my lower body, before I play. When practicing, I start with scales, usually something relevant to the piece I am playing, or vocal exercises that complement the piece I might be singing. And in any successful practice, focusing on tricky parts usually takes precedence over "going through the motions", and I try to smooth those over through repetition, starting slow and then building up to the tempo for performance.

Do you teach music?

I teach voice and piano at my house. I kept my original name from when I lived in Old Northeast, so I call my business Bay Street Music Studio. My website is www.baystreetmusicstudio.com. I also teach an early childhood music program called Music Together; our local business is called Music & Me. Our website is www.youandmeandmt.com.

Describe how you write your own music. What is your creative process? What is the hardest part of the process?

I write when something needs to be said: I tell stories with my songs. But it's hard for me to sit down and write something without being inspired by some event or feeling. Usually my songs are about love, or loss of love, or adventure, or my response to a big global event or a small personal event, even something that may have happened to a friend or a stranger. But the hardest part of the process is the first time I share it with someone!