

Teaching Philosophy Jacob Shipley

The voice is an integral part of our identity not only as performers, but also as people. My own voice journey has spanned many eras of my life from leading the First National Tour of a Broadway musical, to recording and performing my original Folk-Rock music, performing in wedding bands, and even to singing baby music classes in public parks. However, the part of my journey that brought me to teaching voice was an injury I sustained in 2021.

While at a final callback for a production of *Rock of Ages*, I suddenly lost my voice and was unable to access my full range for weeks following. It was terrifying and, while I received excellent care and support from my otolaryngologist, voice therapist, and my own voice teacher, I still felt lost. I became determined to understand the inner intricacies of how injury really happens and what we as singers can do to prevent it. I received my Certificate in Vocology from NYU with the intent of sharing the knowledge of how the voice functions with my students and train them for long and vibrant careers.

In the musical theatre world, performers are often put into boxes or “types” that they then feel they must conform to. However, every body, mind, and voice is unique and conformity can lead to issues like loss of identity and vocal injury. While I have had a successful career as a musical theatre actor, nowadays I mostly sing contemporary music like Rock, Pop, Folk, and Blues. Through teaching contemporary styles, I help both new and experienced singers alike to discover how their voices naturally want to operate. In doing so, my students not only have a healthier emotional connection to their voices, but they also understand how their voices work on a deeper, physical level. This makes them stronger, more confident, and more flexible performers.

My lessons often start with a casual check in to relax into the space and catch up on each other’s lives. We then briefly get into the body with stretching, breathing, and sighing where we find our “flow”. After settling, we warm up with easy vocalizations, resonance training, establishing strength in our multiple laryngeal registers, and blending through passaggios. However, not every lesson with every student is like this and not every exercise works for every student. It’s important to adapt my approach for the voice right in front of me rather than applying some template that I’ve decided works best for everyone.

When working on repertoire, I prioritize materials that my students want to sing, often asking them to bring in their own suggestions. A common phrase you will hear in my lessons is “what do you feel about that?” Students are encouraged to figure out what they do or don’t like about their voices or a performance. My goal is to help my students achieve their goals. If I like the way a student sounds and think it’s sustainable, but they say it’s not right, then I have not done my job. This is a student-centered approach: only when a student likes the way they sound, feels like it’s sustainable, and believes that it’s right for their audience have we found success.

I am currently pursuing an MA in Music and Music Education from Teachers College at Columbia University. I also have a BFA in Musical Theatre from Ithaca College, a Certificate in Vocology from NYU, and a Certificate in Vocal Pedagogy from the CCM Institute at Shenandoah University. I have studied aspects of Bel Canto, Linklater, Speech Level Singing, and more. I am a Registered Vocologist with PAVA and a member of NATS and AEA.