

Kara Ussery

Class Voice

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1/28/15

Music was the inspiration for my very first attempt at communication. My family would frequently sing to me as an infant, and in order to animate our interactions, they would often use hand gestures to go with the songs. One day as my mother rocked me, she realized I was imitating her hand motions in an attempt to have her sing my favorite song, Bringing Home a Baby Bumblebee. I clapped, trapped, smashed, and even got stung by the little imaginary bumblebee in my hands before I was able to put together a complete sentence. Not only was music my first coherent request, but it also marked the beginning of a long, lifetime love for me. When I had trouble learning my phone number and address, my mother taught me in a sing-song chant. It wasn't just a learning device, though- I grew up listening to my dad play guitar around the house. It was rare to ever hear the house silent, and impossible to miss how passionate he was about the chords. I caught his love for music the way other kids catch colds, and proceeded to give imaginary concerts in my bedroom throughout my childhood. I did the usual middle school choirs, and I did them well (attending AllState in both 7th and 8th grades), but my singing didn't get serious until high school.

I began my fifth year of chorus in ninth grade. Not only did I perform in each concert, but I auditioned and won solo acts in several shows performed throughout the year. Additionally, in ninth grade, I auditioned against a highly competitive group for placement in our extra-curricular show choir, Union Groove. As a member of "Groove", I performed at the school's fall concert, and again at Lenox Mall in downtown Atlanta, and finally, at Atlantic Station in December. That

year I was also invited to attend District Six Honors Chorus. Although I auditioned for All State in 2009, My only disappointment came when I missed the opportunity to make my third trip. In spite of this one missed opportunity, I was able to obtain a Letter for Chorus during my freshman year. My tenth grade year, I was thrilled to have been moved to the most advanced choral class that Union Grove offers, Concert Choir, and was even elected by peers as an officer. I managed to once again secure a position in Groove, and I was able to land a large part, acting and singing, in the school's first musical in years, "White Christmas." The beginning of my junior year, however, brought a bit of disappointing news. Because of my decision to dual enroll and take college classes at Clayton State University, I was unable to work my class schedule around Concert Choir. However, because of my commitment to our choral program and my personal dedication to my education in music, I decided to take one of the less advanced classes, Intermediate Mixed, which proved to be an extremely rewarding experience. It was wonderful to be able to get to know people I might not have otherwise gotten the opportunity to and being one of the most advanced singers in the room allows me to develop my leadership skills on a whole different level. Going back and relearning the basics has also helped me to take great strides forward in my music. My peers once again chose me to be an officer and also the section leader of the sopranos. I continued to do Groove and work with Mr. McMichen during our lunch hour on things such as sight reading and ear training, so that I was able to advanced even farther.

While I was in high school choir, my Monday nights were spent with the Spivey Hall Children's Tour Choir. Dr. Martha Shaw, our choir director, hand-picked each member based on character and ability, and I was thrilled and honored to be selected for it. During my time in the choir, this group auditioned for and was chosen as the only children's choir to perform for Chorus America 2010. Shortly thereafter, we spent a week recording our top work for a

professional CD. In addition to things like this and our six local performances each year, the Tour Choir reached out to the community through song and charitable acts of love and respect. Through this choir, I had the opportunity to sing to the elderly in retirement homes throughout the southeast as well as the orphans at Sunvillage Orphanage in China. We performed an emotional piece with the Beijing Children's Choir at the Beijing Concert Hall that overcame cultural boundaries and left both of the choirs and the audience in tears (It was truly a blessing for all of us involved). China wasn't the only trip, though. In between Boston and Charleston, we also travelled to London to perform in several cathedrals there- I can truly say that singing has taken me all over the world.

Even after spending all that time in choir rehearsals, I was still singing in what little of it I had left. My father taught me to strum out a few chords on the guitar, and before I knew it I was writing songs and accompanying him to gigs- nothing big, just restaurant work, but getting paid to sing was something that I found ridiculously cool. I continued to do open mic nights and tiny gigs at local venues throughout high school, even taking the time to record one of my songs professionally. (To this day, it is the only song of mine my friends and roommates seem to know, and if they see me in the room with a guitar, they will request this song ad nauseum.)

Also around that time (and several years before I began working for this company) I had an incredible experience at Walt Disney World as I was chosen from amongst the many people auditioning to compete in their version of The American Idol Experience. After making it through three private auditions and being complimented by each of the three judges on stage following my performance, I won the audience-vote to compete in the Grand Finale. Although I was slighted out of first place by a (handsome) Brit, I now have a friend in London who I kept in touch with for years. Disney remained a place to sing for me, as I auditioned and got a spot in the

Cast Candlelight choir just a few months ago (while I WAS working there), and I had the opportunity to perform alongside guest artists such as Jonathan Groff.

When I graduated high school, I thought that singing was what I wanted to major in, and Berklee was my dream school. As I went about trying to make that dream come true, I was insanely intimidated by the audition process, but I sucked it up and did it anyway- and what do you know? I was accepted. It broke my heart to realize that I couldn't afford it, but just the fact that I was able to gain entrance there- something I never thought I could do- was a huge honor, and I decided not to stop making music. I continue to write to this day, performing original material at No Shame and recording the occasional Youtube cover. It's always something that will be important in my life.