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Aldemaro Romero Jr.

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Regional

Minear teaches the art of teaching singing

The writer and historian Hilaire Belloc once said that singing was one of the world's best trades. But to do it well you need schooling. Filling this need at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is Carolyn Minear, an assistant professor in the department of music.

Minear was born in Knoxville, Tenn., and received her bachelor's degree in music education from Florida State University, where she also earned her master's degree in music history and literature. She earned her doctorate in music education from Michigan State University. Since early in her career, her interest has been in teaching music teachers how to teach.

"I believe that just as creating music requires a degree of artistry, teaching also is an artistic endeavor and when you learn how to communicate with students in ways that mean something to them, it is a transformative experience for the teacher and the student," said Minear, adding that there is no age that is too early to learn how to sing. "Music is a part of life, and singing particularly. It is a life skill that is with us from birth to death."

Walter Turnbull, the founder of the Harlem Children's Choir, said that, "If a child experiences beauty by the age of 11 they will search for it for the rest of their life." Minear agrees. "I think that teaching children to create beautiful singing in community is a transformative experience and it causes them to search for it." Minear added that she loves to witness the transformation that occurs in her students, particularly when confronted with different types of music, much of which might not be familiar.

"They don't know the difference," Minear said about the type of music chosen. "They love everything if you present it



Professor Minear instructing her students.

Shan Lu./SIUE

properly. A Mass, for example, is so much fun to sing because it is so rhythmic. And it is a very accessible piece for children to sing because it has such energy and they love to use all of their bodies and all of their energy to sing."

Although funding for the arts has been declining significantly in the last few

years, Minear said that she sees a bright spot when it comes to choral music. "Every year we have more and more choirs: community choirs, school choirs, church choirs. People are enjoying singing now," she said. "I recently saw it in some of the 9/11 retrospectives with the members of Congress standing on the

steps of the Capitol singing 'God Bless America.' I think that is what we do as human beings. I think that when things are hard, we sing. When things are good, we sing. I think it is a natural part of our lives." Furthermore, she said that she sees an increasing interest among families to have their kids participate in

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

music of all kinds.

"What we have known intuitively for years, we now have proof through brain research that (music) changes the neural connectors in the brain," Minear said. "We do know that students who are active musicians are more disciplined and focused because they have no choice. They work well in groups because music is a community art."

When asked if kids get more nervous than adults when they go on stage, she said that she sees it both ways. "Some students thrive on a stage and some students are nervous on a stage," she said. "And it is up to the conductor to build the kind of community to be accepting of all of their efforts, whether they are nervous that is ok or if they are excited to be on the stage that is ok. When children are maybe 7 they are still a little bit oblivious."

As for what advice she would give a music student, she said that there is no magic formula. "Every music teacher is different, but one thing we share is a passion," she said. "And it is a passion for creating beauty, a passion for human beings, for our fellow human beings, and a passion for working together and for growing together."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.