

The Minnesota NATS Spring Workshop featuring Robert Edwin took place at the MacPhail Center for Music on March 20, 2016. Edwin presented a workshop on gender-neutral pedagogy and an master class in which he worked with seven singers, both males and females, ranging from 10 to 15 years old. Within the workshop, Mr. Edwin sought to cement the idea of gender-neutral pedagogy in the context of how teachers speak to students, approach technical vocal application, and expectations within the lesson.

According to Edwin, long-held ideas of gender stereotypes/biases, cultural biases, and tribal biases affect the way in which we teach and interact with vocal students. Scientifically, there is little difference between the male and female larynx. Many scientists would be hard pressed to identify the gender of a larynx based on an anatomical model. Therefore, why treat the voices of males and females any differently, especially when the function of the larynx is gender-neutral?

Edwin then stressed the importance of the foundations of singing, which he titled the “tion’s.” His important “tion’s” included *respiration*, *phonation*, *resonation*, *articulation*, *audiation*, and *emotion*. A few of Edwin’s ideas that seemed to particularly resonate with the audience were:

- “When a student comes in who is tone deaf, always pay attention to how they converse. If they say ‘that’s good’ when you tell them your hair is on fire, they have an issue with listening, relating back to audiation. Most tone-deaf students simply do not know how to listen properly.”
- “Max out each student in terms of their ranges, dynamic levels, muscle function, etc. Many times with young students, teachers are too careful with their voices.”
- “Don’t groove a student’s technique [by rehearsing their songs without emotion]. The actor and the singer constantly work together.”
- “Break the barriers of where the student’s voices can go...”

The master class with the young singers was equally effective to observe. Sensitively accompanied by Mark Bilyue, seven singers performed art song and musical theatre selections. Edwin worked successfully and supportively with each student. Through the use of humor and his personable nature, Edwin was able to connect with each student and assist them in improving upon each of their performances.

The main qualities that Robert Edwin wished to impart upon the young singers and attendees was that the instrument needs to be stretched and muscles need to work to improve. All performers should know their shoe size and voice size, referring to each singer’s need to know their vocal range and how high they can belt.

When performing, acting is as important as singing. Each singer should practice their vocal exercises while acting, and act while singing to form an interdependent relationship between the actor and singer. The attendees were attentive and posed many wonderful questions to Mr. Edwin, and were supportive of all student performers. When several students performed well-known vocal repertoire, the entire room seem to breathe in tandem with the performers.

Robert Edwin has been a featured writer and editor for the Journal of Singing for more than 30 years. Internationally recognized as a singer, songwriter, teacher, and

author, Mr. Edwin is a frequent faculty member at the Voice Foundation's Annual Symposium: Care of the Professional Voice, and is an active member of the distinguished American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS).