

Regional

SIUE's Schapman trains future opera singers

Many people consider opera to be a very sophisticated art form, one that requires coordination and knowledge of foreign languages. It also, of course, requires talent. Someone who uses his talent and training to teach others opera is Marc Schapman, an assistant professor in the department of music at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Schapman was born in Carroll, Iowa. He obtained his bachelor's degree in music from Luther College, and his master's and doctoral degrees also in music from Indiana University. Growing up in a small Midwest town might seem to present challenges for an aspiring opera singer, but Schapman credits good early mentors for helping to fuel his interest.

"I was encouraged by my music instructors at a young age to pursue singing," he said. "I remember the first opera I went to and I thought to myself, 'Hey, I kind of like this,' and became fascinated by all of the sets and the singing and the drama and sort of got the opera bug at that point in high school."

That does not mean that the career path he followed was an easy one for a youngster. He was recruited to play college football, and was forced early on to decide on whether his future was in music or athletics.

"I was also a theater and dance minor in college, and so two days a week I would come late to football practice because I was coming from ballet class," Schapman said. "So you can imagine the kind of grief that I took on those days."

From there he moved to Indiana University, which has one of the largest music schools in the world with about 1,500 majors.

"If you go to a school like that and really focus on yourself and on your craft and absorb yourself into everything that is happening there, there are countless events every single day in that music program," Schapman said. "Then you can find yourself really growing exceptionally as a musician."

In his role as a music instructor, Schapman not only teaches students but also counsels them on how to approach a singing career.

"The field is completely saturated with hundreds and thousands of singers who seek several other jobs other than singing to maintain their livelihood," he

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said. "It takes a lot of work. It is a big personal commitment to be successful in this field and even if you might happen to be among the lucky ones who are successful, there is not always a big financial payback in this particular field. And so you have to make sure to guide singers into this field who really truly feel that this is the only thing that they could do and be truly happy doing."

On top of the training in music, acting, and dancing, opera singers also need to learn foreign languages such as French, German and Italian, along with taking diction classes to make sure that they pronounce words correctly. While audiences for opera have been getting older – and smaller – Schapman said that he believes that there is hope for the genre.

"I think that we really need to reach out to the young in society," Schapman said. "And I think there are a lot of directors and producers who are now trying to present famous works in the repertoire in more accessible ways to contemporary and younger audiences. I think sometimes what happens with a lot of our undergraduates in some instances who end up being the more successful ones at times is that we sort of have to 'brainwash' them a little bit." He is hopeful that more and more young people will find a call into opera.

"You get your hands on them and give them classical pieces to train their voices and the bug sort of bites them like it sort of bit me at their age," Schapman said. "A lot of students don't grow up thinking 'I am going to go sing 'La Boheme' or 'La Traviata.' I mean there are definitely some like that but sometimes we have to encourage them down that road."

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.



Photo courtesy of Marc Schapman

Professor Marc Schapman during one of his performances.