

ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
Annual Meeting 2016

Keynote Address

“Where The Music Comes From: The Fire of Possibility”

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Good morning and thank you for the great honor of speaking at your annual gathering.

Music and education have always been deeply connected in my life. From pre-school onward, the most indelible teachers and mentors – whose faces and names I will always recall – were music educators and administrators: the generous, hard-working, demanding, infuriating, passionate people who saw something special in me. In addition to the education and encouragement they offered, they helped me to explore a horizon of possibility beyond anything I could have imagined. If it weren't for these remarkable people, I would not be addressing you today as an opera composer and pianist who has made his life in music for more than 18 years.

Eight operas, 300 art songs, and many, many other compositions later, from grade school in Bexley, Ohio to graduate school at UCLA, and ever since, you have always been there for someone like me.

Now I am here for you.

I'm here because of our mutual, overwhelming, driving passion for music and education – our essential need to connect through this most mysterious and intangible of art forms. I'm here because there is a war on the arts in our country and we are all on the front lines. Arts organizations are struggling to win new audiences and to hang onto the audiences they already have. Recitals exist almost exclusively at music schools. Music, dance, and art are politicized as “elite” – and what little government funding we have is at risk of disappearing entirely. Great singers and instrumentalists I know who should be busy all the time are frighteningly available. Thank goodness for the amazing, generous individuals and foundations devoted to the arts: they keep it all going from love and the wisdom that the arts can bind and define community. And thank goodness for you.

You are all heroes in my book, working for something essential and helping to shape the future of the arts in this country. I know how difficult this struggle is. I know what it is to justify and defend every single day why music schools and music education matter. I get tired of defending it, too. It's so obvious! What's wrong with these people?

I cannot imagine what you all go through – especially with the divisive and toxic political climate we have been enduring. I travel quite a bit for productions, performances, and short residencies, and it seems clear to me that we are in the midst of a massive cultural identity crisis. And this is when we must kick it into high gear, because a big part of what we do – what we are charged to do in the arts – is to awaken, inspire, gather, and connect.

Recently, I heard a choral director say: “If I could just get Congress to sing together *five* minutes every day, think what a difference it might make! Just let me at ‘em! *Five minutes!*”

Why is it that celebrations and memorials include music we can sing together? Mothers sing to their babies. We always sing together at birthdays and many public events begin with our national anthem. This is what music always does: unites us in song and spirit whatever our differences are. Music *is* the great equalizer, the great bridge through time and we are absolutely starved for it: children and adults alike. Consider some of the most popular shows on TV: *The Voice*, *Dancing With the Stars*, *Glee*, *America's Got Talent*, specials on PBS and Disney, and what about half-time shows at the Super Bowl? We all yearn to sing and move together: to work together as a unit. We all yearn for community through music.

Music is essential – and it is essentially *optimistic*. It is about the future. It is about what we can work on today, create and experience together tomorrow. It has never been easy, but it is legacy. It is the best of what we can do as individuals and together. It is our hearts and souls. It is then, now, and always. It is the setting aside of differences to reflect, work together, create something beautiful, meaningful, fun, amazing, to make a permanent mark on another's heart, to strive for perfection and demand the best within us, to open up a dialogue, and to make us all better than we ever thought we could be on our own. That's one of the things I love most about it: music challenges me to be better, do better, reach further, work harder, demand more of myself and others than any of us think is possible or even reasonable.

During rehearsals for the world premiere of *Moby-Dick* here in Dallas in 2010, the great tenor Stephen Costello was high up on a mast singing an aria. I remarked to the director that because of the hat Stephen was wearing, I couldn't see his face while he was singing. Could he please take off his hat while he sings? The director went to Stephen and explained my request. Stephen said, "I like my hat." The director said, "Well, Jake doesn't ask for much, Stephen, so if you could please..." Stephen interrupted him and said, "Wait a second, Jake doesn't ask for *much*? Have you *seen* this score? Have you *seen* where I'm singing it? Jake doesn't ask for *MUCH*? Are you *kidding* me?"

Raise the bar! This is what you do in our music schools. We are mere mortals and in music we aim for perfection. It's got to be right! We all know that Bach's *St Matthew Passion* is truly great. Can we ever be as great as *it* is? I have indelible memories of my UCLA days when we studied and worked together relentlessly on Brahms' *Requiem*, Bach's *B Minor Mass*, Mozart's *C Minor Mass*, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. It was maddening, revelatory and inspiring. We set our differences aside to learn, strive, and try together. To move and be moved together. To dance, laugh, cry, and celebrate, sometimes all at the same time. It is deeply personal, and it is universal. It is inspiring and worth fighting for. That is what I fight for. That's why I'm here with you today.

So what is this terrible struggle now between music, education and popular culture? What has happened? What can be done? Are these devices and flat screens going to be the end of it all? Is the easy access of information actually numbing and dumbing us down? How can we wake people up? This is what the arts do – wake us up! They give us reflection, inspiration, stimulation; they gather us and open up a shared experience and opportunity for conversation and dialogue. They give us a perspective and empathy we might not have had. My dear friend Sister Helen Prejean, author of the book *Dead Man Walking*, always says: "Music can open up parts of your heart you might not even know you have."

We must all be warriors for the arts. And if you are in the arts, you already know it demands all of you. We work hard – all the time – we work hard, pay attention, and make choices.

About five years ago, when *Moby-Dick* was being produced in San Diego, my then 79-year old mother was taking a music appreciation class for seniors. She does not have a background in music, but she does have a son deeply involved in it. So, Mom has been eager to learn more about concert music and opera. My mother has had a lifelong affection for education, reading, teaching,

and the sharing of ideas. After my father's suicide when I was 10, my mom was faced with raising four children on her own. She was 39-years old in 1972 when this happened. She went back to work and back to school. She showed me by example that school and learning is about much more than textbooks and tests: it is filled with ideas, connection, possibility, and some really fabulous people. That led her to a master's degree and later, at 67-years old, a Ph.D. in Nursing Science. She retired a year later after 30 years of service in nursing and nursing administration/education with the Veterans Affairs. Now she's 84 and living in San Francisco, attending concerts, the opera, going to museums, walking, reading. She has more friends than I will ever have.

Meanwhile, back in San Diego five years ago, my mother's 82-year old music appreciation teacher invited me to visit and talk to the class, to discuss opera, my career, songwriting, etc. I started off by asking a question: "What comes first, music or words?" There was a little prize for the correct answer. So let me ask you here this morning, as well: What comes first, the music or the words?

People were calling out "Words!" "Music!" "Words!" "Music!" ...and I said, "You're all wrong! Before the words or the music, there's the STORY." Then a woman raised her hand and said, "Oh, I thought you were going to say a commission check." I gave her the prize.

A number of years ago, I met Clive Davis, the great music producer who discovered Whitney Houston and Barry Manilow. The good friend who introduced us said, "This is my friend Jake Heggie. He writes operas." I said to Mr. Davis, "Yes, I'm in it for the money." He exploded into laughter.

So before the music or the words, there is a story. I call it "the well." If the well is deep, rich, filled with big emotions and transformation, it might inspire wonderful words, a strong architecture, and potentially beautiful, powerful music. The vibration starts there – and this is ALL about vibrations. The writer and I will each explore the well, then join forces to see what happens. After we've done our long and demanding work, the performers, director, and designers must then explore not only what we've written, they must visit "the well," too; see how it feels and resonates for them and bring that to the work. This has been the case with *Dead Man Walking*, *Moby-Dick*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Great Scott*, *Three Decembers*, and all the songs – rich, deep wells that provide possibility.

But in the end, where does the *music* really come from?

I get asked this all the time. It's the million-dollar question. "So Jake, where does all that music come from?" After eight operas, several one-acts, 300 songs, chamber, choral, and orchestral work I still don't know the answer. I don't know where the music comes from, but I know what I need for the music to emerge, to unfold and reveal itself: I need an invitation from someone who wants the work; a great story that inspires, challenges, or even terrifies me (*Moby-Dick*, anyone?) and will sustain me and my team for several years; I need that indescribable shiver of recognition; extraordinary collaborators, privacy, time, a deadline, *another* deadline, communication, isolation, society, anonymity... I need to feel "selected" ... I need to feel the flame – that mysterious fire in the belly – the fire of possibility – the flame of inspiration – and I need to live in "the well."

The stories that inspire or move me most are those of identity and belonging. How an individual finds his or her place in the world and what a sense of belonging really is. Intimate, transformative stories with large, often hostile forces at work – always looming in the background – high stakes at every turn.

Here is some of my story.

I was raised in Bexley, Ohio – just outside of Columbus – one of four children. We had a very nice suburban life. I grew up in a school system that included choir and art almost every day – and we put on at least one musical each year. There was music in our house, mostly the jazz and big band music my father loved. The record player was always going. My dad had wanted to be a jazz saxophonist, but as a first generation American from Hungarian parents, that was not acceptable. So, he became a doctor and married my mother, who was a nurse.

I remember hearing my father play his saxophone and he exposed us to the music he loved, including great singers: Jo Stafford, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass! Music was FUN. I listened to my own records: Barbra Streisand, musicals, classical performances. I watched TV incessantly: *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Sonny & Cher*, *Laugh-In*, all the great variety shows. And I went to movies, especially movie musicals. When I was old enough, during the summer, I'd ride my bike to the movie theater and stay all day. At seven years old, my parents bought a small piano and I started lessons. I'll never forget that first day. My new teacher taught me to play "Hot Cross Buns" and I felt like a genius. I could play the piano! I tortured the neighbors with that piece and all the pieces from the John Schaum piano method.

Then, when I was 10 years old, my father took his life. Unknown to me and my siblings, he had long suffered from crushing depression. All we knew as children was that he left us – abandoned us – a bomb went off in our family, there was emotional shrapnel and wreckage everywhere. We looked for shelter where we could find it. My shelter and saving grace was music.

A week after my father's death, I turned 11 and started composing. No one told me to do it, I just thought "I can do that." I felt safe, secure, special, empowered, and successful in music. My world was Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, Debussy, Barbra Streisand, Carly Simon, Julie Andrews, James Taylor, and a little later, disco! Music remained FUN for me. Days were spent in the public library looking through scores, then the sheet music store and the record store flipping through hundreds of LPs and learning. I spent my paper route money on music, records and silent movies. I collected silent movies from the Blackhawk Film catalogue and played them on my Super 8 projector, sometimes making up scores to go along with them.

I found music everywhere and I was on fire with it. I played the piano six hours a day and wrote music when I wasn't playing. I never felt alone though often I felt very lonely. School wasn't hard for me – I enjoyed it and managed to keep good grades.

When I turned 16, we moved to California and I was introduced to the composer Ernst Bacon, my first composition teacher, with whom I worked for two years, until I graduated high school and went to the American College in Paris. I thought about a conservatory or music school, but they intimidated and scared me. I was afraid I'd fail at one of the schools that had been suggested to me. I also yearned to break away from suburbia and explore the world – especially to live in Paris, where my musical heroes had lived, walked, and worked. I wrote lots of songs and ballads to my own lyrics and read through reams of music. I traveled far and wide with a Eurail Pass. Along the way, I found my people: mostly singers, teachers, performers, and other pianists.

After two years in Paris, I went to UCLA to study with Johana Harris, the widow of composer Roy Harris. She opened up the world of music to me as nobody had before: composers became real, music started to live in a remarkable way. It was *about* something. It had personality. It told me the story of the composer and their time. Johana had been a child prodigy. After studying with Ernest Hutcheson at the Juilliard when she was 10 years old, she became the youngest faculty member in that school's history at age 16. Before that, in Ottawa, she studied with Henry

Puddicombe, a student of Martin Krause, who had been a student of Liszt. Liszt, of course, knew Chopin and his circle of Schumann, Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, etc. Liszt had played for Beethoven. Beethoven had played for Mozart. Johana had played for Rachmaninoff and played duets with Barber. She had known Gershwin, Copland, and Bernstein. Now I was playing for her. Through Johana, I felt a staggering legacy and connection and realized that 200 years is not all that long. I studied film scoring with David Raksin, the composer of the song “Laura,” who had begun his career working with Charlie Chaplin on the movie *Modern Times*.

I experienced magical teaching. The world of art stopped being portraits and marble busts of beloved composers and performers. It stopped being lofty, sacred, and unapproachable. It became human, visceral, real, messy, magical, and somehow even more miraculous than before. Real people did all of this! They made choices and did all of this. The literature, art, and politics were also connected to the music. I used to wonder where Chopin came from – how he emerged. Where did all that filigree and those lissome lines come from? Then I realized Chopin went to the opera – he heard the *bel canto* music of the time. It was all a great revelation.

I was learning directly from the keepers of a universal, timeless, most mysterious flame. The flame that had been guiding me all along. That fire ignited possibility and imagination like nothing I had ever felt. It also came with a great sense of responsibility to preserve the flame and share it in some way. The flame had always been there, of course, but now it was at full power.

The resources at the UCLA Department of Music were extraordinary. I got lost in the library, listened to records, and went to concerts. On campus, the Béjart Ballets came through Paul Taylor Dance, Hubbard Street, great orchestras, chamber musicians, and singers. Pierre Boulez was in residence with the LA Philharmonic on campus. We interacted with the maestro and with composer Elliot Carter, who came to my composition class and was as grumpy as anyone I’d ever met. None of that would have happened had I not been at the Department of Music. I wrote for my colleagues and teachers. In Los Angeles, I heard *Sweeney Todd*, then *Peter Grimes* with Jon Vicars, then *Tosca*, *Figaro*, *Così*, *Wozzeck*, *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. Opera jumped to life for me, as did great singers. I had always thought opera was a little silly, but I had my “aha!” moment and it suddenly made sense why people were so excited about this massive art form.

I took a one-year break after my undergrad, but only a year because I missed school enormously and I knew I had a lot more work to do. I felt successful when I was surrounded by music and study. I went back to UCLA for a Master degree in Composition.

University life gave me immense opportunities in study and experience. I could try, fail, try again, work with amazing teachers and great student colleagues. I also wound up as a page turner for concerts at Royce Hall by Leontyne Price, Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Kiri Te Kanawa, Renata Scotto. Being onstage with those great artists – can you imagine? I was the pianist for the school choirs, faculty soloists, learning the art song rep, and composing songs to Dickinson, Housman, and others. It was like a dream.

And then, over a short period of time, I developed a focal dystonia in my right hand as it started to curl up and cramp uncontrollably when I’d play. I was 28 years old and couldn’t play the piano anymore. My musical identity thrown into chaos, I felt full of doubts and lost my drive to compose. I fell into a dark space. I didn’t like myself. I was also struggling with a deeper identity, coming to grips with being gay during the terrible AIDS crisis of the 1980s. I felt out of step with the world and like an immense failure. With only my thesis left to submit, I dropped out of graduate school.

The precious, innate fire that had always felt like an indelible gift – part of my DNA – had become a painful reminder of something lost. I decided to try to ignore it, douse it, or redirect it somehow. A new quest for identity began.

The benefits of academia are numerous. The danger in academia is isolation and separation from the outside world. Not the “real world,” for we all have a different sense of what is “real.” But, I suddenly had to make a living outside of academia and outside playing the piano, making music, or composing. I told this to the amazing woman who ran the UCLA Center for the Arts, Pebbles Wadsworth. She was the one who had asked me to turn pages for all those Royce Hall concerts. She connected me with a private performing arts series that needed a new leader just then. I got the job.

Through this, I met managers, agents, learned about producing concerts, raising money and philanthropic work. Things never discussed when I was in school. After a year and half, this special mentor offered me a job at the UCLA Center for the Arts where I learned more about the practical side of music. I wrote press releases, brochure copy, speeches, and letters. I got to know journalists, the critical press, editors, etc.

But even in the midst of all this learning and experience, I felt haunted by the ghosts of possibility lost to me because of my hand injury. My identity had been shattered. I still felt like a total failure, a stranger to myself. I had been entrusted with that flame of possibility and legacy, and I felt I had disgraced it, even though it still burned deep inside. Also, being known as an injured musician means that even if you heal, you’ll never be considered the same way. A former composition teacher at UCLA kept pushing me to finish my degree, but it was too hard at the time. I pushed away and tried to put the fire away, too. But you all know that this remarkable flame refuses to be ignored. It just keeps burning deep inside. It is truth – and it will not be ignored forever.

I decided to move to San Francisco to escape the ghosts, because nobody in the Bay Area really knew me as a musician. Perhaps I would find myself up there. Just before I moved, at this very low point, I confessed to a close colleague and friend, Celesta Billeci, that I had to leave Los Angeles because I was a failure. She looked me in the eye and said “Jake, you’re one of the most successful people I know.” It was a lifeline I took with me to San Francisco. That I carry with me today. It was a gift. What is it to be successful? What is a success in life? In music?

A job in the Public Relations/Marketing Department at Cal Performances, UC Berkeley awaited me in the Bay Area. Then, miraculously, a few months later I was chosen for a job at the San Francisco Opera as the company’s writer: press releases, company reports, speeches, letters, etc. I was good at it and I had a lot to learn.

I began to play the piano again, thanks to lessons with Nina Skolnik of UC Irvine who retrained me using Dorothy Taubman’s technique. I worked with a great impresario Lotfi Mansouri, who was the general director of San Francisco Opera. In my job, I met and heard some of the great singers of our time: Frederica von Stade, Renée Fleming, Thomas Hampson, Jennifer Larmore, Anna Netrebko, Bryn Terfel, Dawn Upshaw, Sylvia McNair. I became friends with conductor Patrick Summers and began a musical partnership that has lasted more than 22 years. (Patrick has conducted all six of my large-scale opera premieres.) I engaged with great designers, composers, administrators, and pianists. I also met and developed long-lasting friendships with the remarkable people who support the arts in San Francisco: the benefactors who generously keep the machine running. It was the best apprenticeship imaginable for an aspiring opera composer – even though I didn’t know I was an opera composer at that point.

I watched opera created from the ground up. My job was to get to know every corner of the opera house and the business of opera: to filter it, write about it, and get it out into the world. I attended rehearsals, worked with photographers, got to know administration, artists, orchestra, chorus, scene shop, props, wig and makeup, every union, every inch of that opera house, and then wrote stories to get information to the press. My responsibility was to spread the word about opera and connect it to the community, and then connect the community to the opera. And what a vast, remarkable community it was. Seekers of the flame and keepers of the flame united in the magical space of the opera house. An enormous family.

Rehearsals were revelations. The rep I experienced was comprehensive. It was opera produced at the highest level with the greatest artists in the world. I was feeling that fire of possibility again. But it didn't hurt, it inspired.

Flicka von Stade particularly moved me with her humanity and generosity. She befriended me. And though she didn't know me as a composer or pianist, I took a chance and set some folk songs for her. After a moment of wide-eyed terror (*"Oh goody, the PR Guy writes songs!"*) we read through them together. She loved them. She invited me to give concerts with her and started telling other people about my songs. She recorded a demo with me. I entered the G. Schirmer Art Song Competition of 1995 and later learned they had decided I would be one of the winners the same day that Johana Harris passed away in Los Angeles.

Soon, great singers were coming to the PR Office not to look at their files, but to ask if I had a song for them, or if I'd write one for them. Flicka recommended me for projects with the San Francisco Girls Chorus, the Louisville Symphony, the LA Phil at the Hollywood Bowl. She became a champion in the truest sense. She remains one of my best friends and an inspiration on what it means to mentor and reach out. She recognized something special in me. I felt identified and chosen.

I found out a colleague at the San Francisco Opera was also a composer, so I went to talk to him: "Hey, I'm a composer, too. I'd love to hear some of your work sometime." The response was a 10-minute diatribe about how "hard" it was to find time to write accompanied by relentless whining and complaining. Another valuable lesson learned: that will never be me. You do your work. You work really hard because it means so much, it's a privilege and it's what you must do. I felt inspired anew and I was finding a place inside the music world again, not just adjacent to it. My true identity was re-emerging. By day I wrote press releases, and in my spare time – whenever I could find it – I wrote art songs. I was happy and I thought this would be an okay way to live my life.

And then, out of the blue, the general director of the San Francisco Opera changed everything. He said, "So you're writing all these songs for singers and they are getting done all over the world. Ever thought of writing an opera?" "Um, NO," I replied laughing. And he said, "Well, we should talk." I thought he was being nice. The next day he asked for a meeting and I showed up ready to write the next speech or press release. He said, put the pad down. I think you're a theater composer and I want to send you to New York City to meet Terrence McNally. We have a spot on the 2000 Season and I'd like you two to think of on opera, maybe a comedy or something celebratory for the new millennium." At first I thought, "Who are you talking to!?"

And just like that, the fire was in full flame again. I felt enormous possibility, music, energy and life. I called my mother and said, "Mom! The San Francisco Opera has invited me to write an opera for the main stage!" Her reply was "You can't do *that!*" Another reality check. *Could* I write an opera?

Lotfi sent me to New York City to meet Terrence and a couple of years later, I was the composer in residence at San Francisco Opera to create my first work. Lotfi's "comedy" turned out to *Dead Man Walking* a serious, dark American drama. Sister Helen Prejean called me out of the blue when it was first announced and said, "Jake, this is Sister Helen Prejean. I heard that San Francisco Opera wants to make an opera out of *Dead Man Walking*. You know what I said to that, Jake? I said *OF COURSE* we're gonna make an opera out of *Dead Man Walking*! But Jake, I don't know boo-scat about opera, so you're gonna have to educate me!"

Flicka told me I needed to record a CD of my songs. Renée and my other singer pals volunteered to participate. I used the entrepreneurial skills I had developed in my PR days to produce the CD, raise the money, get it done. My close friend from UCLA days, David Kuehn, was then head of classical at RCA Red Seal. With my famous cast on board, RCA made *The Faces of Love* a major release in 1999 and G. Schirmer published the songs. That same year, I met Curt Branom, who became my husband in 2008 and with whom I've shared this journey the past 17 years. The business of music was teaching me about the close network of friends and colleagues: we show up for each other. Always. It is an immense, beautiful, remarkable family.

It was during the composition of *Dead Man Walking* that I came to the realization that I'm a theater composer. And it was the first time I really thought about the difference between an abstract symphonist – a soloist – and a theater composer – a collaborator. Verdi knew where his home was, so did Puccini. I had found my home, too.

The world premiere of *Dead Man Walking* was on October 7, 2000. Let's just say it went *well*. Since San Francisco, the piece has been produced on five continents. Early next year, the opera will be produced at the Kennedy Center, marking its 50th international production.

It was not what anyone would call a traditional or predictable path to a life in music. This is something I tell students: you must blaze your own trail, step by step. There are no guarantees and there is no map. I was given the gift of an opening, a doorway to a remarkable career. Someone who said, "Yes, you." I was – and still am – willing to work hard for it day and night. I had lived through what I thought was the worst thing that could have happened – and it turned out to be an immense gift. The people who entrusted me with the precious flame would, I hope, be very proud.

Just after the *Dead Man Walking* premiere, Flicka introduced me to Kay Payn at Bucknell University, who invited me to come work with her students. I had never given a master class, but she gave me the opportunity and told me later, "Jake, you're a teacher." Suddenly another door opened. The late Doug Lowry at Cincinnati Conservatory invited me there. Then other universities and colleges of music called. A former composition professor at UCLA reached out to me and said, "When are you going to finish your master's degree? All you have to do is submit a composition and the paperwork." I returned to UCLA to be a student for one more day, and I'm pleased to tell you I finished my degree 17 years after I started it.

It's been inspiring and reassuring these past years during my short residencies at universities, colleges, and conservatories. Many of the practical parts of the arts world that were not taught when I was in school are now being addressed in the curriculum. Yes, technique, history, theory, orchestration, collaboration, research, and scholarship – but also tax law, legal issues in the arts, creating a corporation, self publishing, creating and managing a website, learning to network, learning to represent yourself and speak well, how to give an interview, how to conduct an interview, how to raise money, other careers in the arts, and other careers connected to the arts.

Also, exciting new bridges that never existed are being built between arts organizations and music schools. My upcoming world premiere, *It's a Wonderful Life*, is a co-commission between

Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Indiana University. Several of my operas or concerts of songs have been produced at universities and conservatories, and that usually includes some kind of visit to work with students, talk with them and let them know what it's like out there in the big wide world.

Most major arts organizations have an education component now. Often, it is connected to a music school. These connections must be nurtured and strengthened. I yearn for a day when the curriculum requires every performance major at a conservatory or college of music to go to a grade school regularly over the period of a year to work with children – to get them involved with music, making music from the inside. It's not enough to take them to the opera or the symphony – they must participate. It is the physicality of music, art, and theater that engages these kids.

I worry about young people today not having the experience we all had as students: digging through stacks of books, records, and files for research: the time, physical labor, and effort needed to search for music and make discoveries. It's a tactile and sensory experience to dig around in a library, to learn by doing, moving and working for it; very different from sitting on a couch, tapping at your phone or computer and getting the answer.

Recently, during a short residency at a prestigious university, I was asked to listen to and evaluate some composition students' first art songs. When I inquired what art songs they had listened to there were blank stares. Favorite opera singers or recitalists? Blank stares. The entire world of rep is at their fingertips, but there wasn't the curiosity to look things up and listen. That is tragic and frightening to me. To this day, I write all my music by hand because making a mess and having that tactile connection is essential to me. I know I'm an old fogey in this regard, but committing to the page is essential. Technology is wonderful and miraculous, but do we control *it* or does it control *us*? We must keep music PHYSICAL as well as INTELLECTUAL.

You can't depend on a device to learn your music for you, to do the incredibly demanding, physical labor of art. Students will say to me, "But it's so much *easier* and faster to write music with the computer." Or "It will be so much *easier* to learn this music with a midi file or a YouTube video." Who said writing or learning music is *easy*??? Who are these lazy musicians??? Believe me, in the professional world, nobody tolerates a lazy musician. Whining is also discouraged.

Writing by hand certainly hasn't slowed me, and it didn't slow down my heroes either – the composers I met spiritually through Johana Harris at UCLA. You have to show up and do it yourself. It is in the physical effort of music that your personality as a performer and creator emerges. It's the same with composition. It requires tremendous mental exertion, of course, but it requires showing up and the physical act of writing. The stillness and quiet of listening. That's where, I believe, one develops a personal profile in music. Writing prolifically, making a mess, finding your way out of it, hearing it done by the best performers possible in front of an audience, listening to the friendly loving ears of your honest friends and colleagues, making changes, moving on, writing more, making another mess, figuring it out, working harder. Being alone. Being with people.

So where does the music come from? What is "the well"? What is this flame in music that is ignited, shared and passed along from teacher to student time and time again? It is truth. Identity. Relevance. Passion. Connection. It is in each one of us waiting and aching to be awakened. It is why schools of music are essential.

What did I *not* learn in college? I was immersed in history, technique, legacy, a great tradition of research and scholarship, study, trial and error. But I did not have hands-on experience in the professional world of music until I was hit with the tragedy of losing my ability to perform and

my drive to compose. And believe it or not, when the General Director of the San Francisco Opera asked me to compose an opera, he did not ask to see my UCLA degree.

I have been involved with several mentoring programs to work with young composers and librettist, most notably at the Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative. I have been invited to work with students at Boston University, Bucknell, Cornell, CCM, The Royal Conservatory in Toronto, UNI, UNT, CU Boulder, TLU, USC, UCLA, Vanderbilt, SongFest in LA, the Ravinia Festival, and many other places. This year, stops include Eastman, Northwestern, Wyoming, KU and Peabody. What an immense honor and privilege it is to work with gifted young people at this stage of their lives, share stories and fan the flames.

Professionalism, humanity, collaboration, wisdom, service, study, and hard work – the flame of inspiration – these are all best demonstrated and ignited by example and personal connection. Your precious, important job is to keep the fire burning. To ignite possibility and instill the sense of responsibility that goes along with this flame: it is the passing of a torch. It is an immense responsibility and it matters enormously.

We make choices along the way – some good and some bad. We work hard. But throughout our lives we wait, we yearn, to be chosen. “How about you?” Professionally and personally, we wait to be chosen. I think sometimes we forget how powerful it is to choose and be chosen by another.

Last year, I wrote an opera called *Great Scott*, premiered here in Dallas by the Dallas Opera. The story and libretto are by Terrence McNally. It is a story about relevance and personal sacrifice. A great opera singer, Arden Scott – played by Joyce DiDonato – wonders if all the compromises and sacrifices she's made have been worth it. She wonders what might have been had she not chosen to devote herself entirely to a life in music. At one point, she sits with her most important mentor and teacher – the one who awakened the flame in her, who was played by Frederica von Stade – and says:

“Oh, Mrs. F., I wanted to be famous and wonderful. But famous and wonderful aren't enough. I want to matter. If I don't, I'm a dancing dog – a circus freak. I want what I do, what we all do to reach someone. Even one person. I want to transform one life the way you transformed mine.”

Where does the music come from?

It is ignited by possibility and imagination. It is a fire awakened and instilled in us by great teachers, mentors, stories, events, and the music itself. It is awakened when we choose to participate, and when someone in our professional or our personal lives reaches out and says, “Okay, how about you? Yes, you.”

You are the keepers of that flame of possibility. The music is there. It is in the legacy, the information and experience you have gained that goes beyond ego and speaks deeply to all of us. You have a great responsibility. We all do.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need a powerful, strong, vital system of music education. It is essential and it changes lives. It changed mine. It changed yours. The ripple effect is extraordinary and unknowable. Someone needs to step up and save the day. And I choose you. I choose you to ignite and keep the fire of possibility. I choose you to help others to find and feel where the music comes from. I choose you.

Now let's get to work.

Thank you.