



DIANE SYRCLE: AN INSPIRED LIFE

This Oregon Symphony executive discusses giving, responsibility, feeling good, God's sense of humor and singing.



Singing well requires conscious attention to breathing in and breathing out. Living well requires conscious attention to taking in and giving back. As a singer, a choir director and now as Executive Vice President for Development at the Oregon Symphony, Diane Syrcle is living a life of inspiring generosity.

"The question," Syrcle says, "is how do we connect to people's passion for something in a way that helps them share their resources? Whatever it is — schools, literacy, why is music important, why does music matter — money is a tool. When we have resources, we have a responsibility to share them with others."

Syrcle's path of intertwining music, spirituality, and giving started early. She grew up singing in church in Texas; she says that singing was "how the scriptures got up in me." Syrcle says she was profoundly shaped by the evidence of faith in action through God and the Bible in church and music. "I heard the message about living up to your full potential and giving all of the gifts you had to offer."

Syrcle went to college to study conducting "thinking I would help the world by being the world's best choir director." She says that she got lucky and won some gigs singing opera in Houston, Shreveport, and Amarillo, but she always had church jobs while singing in opera.

She was able to parlay her singing and education background into a job doing music education with Portland Opera. Her choice of Portland as a home came about because she fell in love with a woman, Susan Leo, who told her that she wanted to start a church.

Partnering up with Leo, Syrcle helped to found Bridgeport United Church of Christ and was eventually commissioned as the Music Minister of their church, which they served together until Leo retired from that pastorate in 2011.

Syrcle's path took her to the Portland Youth Philharmonic where she says, "I fell in love with organizational development. I love how it intersects with community, how it intersects with artists, how communities participate together."

Syrcle is Christian and she says that she loves the Buddhist idea that when our hands are open, we give and we receive. "When our hands are closed, we are isolated and cut off from life and that's just miserable. Most people are not giving away money to get the tax deduction, they are giving because it feels good." (A study from the University of British Columbia in 2008 confirms higher reported levels of happiness from those who give money away above those given the same amounts to spend on themselves).

Feeling good is central to Syrcle's idea of what spirituality is and what it's for. "I think it's great to feel good," she says. "There is a scripture passage that says, 'The joy of the Lord is my strength.' We know that Jesus was a real person who liked to go fishing with his friends and drink wine. He had joy in his life."

"God's sense of humor is apparent all around us. If we are not enjoying life, what's the point?"

Syrcle says that her spiritual practice is everywhere, "I find God with the people I get to talk to every day. I encounter the Divine at symphony concerts. When I'm singing is when I find God most profoundly. The very heart of singing is inspiration. The greatest experience of God is when I'm singing with other people, breathing into the ground, releasing my voice into glory. When I'm singing with others, we are becoming inspired together. That's where God is."§

Just Out's Like a Prayer is written by Rev. Jennifer Yocum, pastor of the Forest Grove United Church of Christ. Reach her at Jennifer@JustOut.com