

and yoga? "It's imperative for singers," Hibbard says, "because we are our instruments. We are the physical manifestation of our music. I always say we should be singing athletes."

As the exercises progress, Hibbard plays a diverse, sometimes jarring kaleidoscope of music. Greensleeves to Green Day, Bach to Bobby McFerrin. "I try everything," says Hibbard. "Because you never know what's going to hit."

Movement training also helps the students work together and evoke passion in their performances, realizing what it takes to be a pro.

"They come to us as race horses," says Hibbard. "We harness them in and teach them to work together. That's why I have them move together and stand in sections. It's not random. From the moment they begin, they are working as an ensemble. Royce and Helmuth send that message from the top down: It's about the music and the festival, not about ego or being stars."

JABBERWOCKY

Back at rehearsal with Armstrong, the students move from Mozart, Pentecost, and Latin to a light-hearted choral rendition of Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky. "I need to feel that creature coming over my shoulder," says Armstrong. "That jabberwocky is always coming, so you better beware." They erupt in laughter.

"Women, I don't want it any louder. Can you just sound more frightened?" As they sing, he narrates, bringing cinematic drama to the story.

"Can we see that vorpal sword?" asks Armstrong. "He starts to daydream. And then all of a sudden that sucker's behind him! Can you see snot coming out of his nose? Drool coming out of his mouth. Bad teeth because he needs an orthodontist? That's what we need to see here."

He works on the "ka" sound in "snicker snack." The "d" on "dead." "Dead you sucker!" Armstrong shouts over the singing.

At the end, dead silence. Armstrong looks up and smiles. "Did he get it? Return of the Jabberwocky. The sequel," he says, allowing a moment of laughter before drawing them back into focus.

"I was pretty comfortable working with Armstrong," says Andre Hayes, a student who entered the academy as a graduate of Reynolds High School in Troutdale. "It felt more like a personal level than a professional level working with him. He definitely makes you feel like you're an important individual."

Hayes wants to be a choir teacher some day. "I really enjoy it when a big group of people is passionate about something like music. It can bring people together. It's the most beautiful sound in the world."

LAST DAY

On the last day of the program, the students are physically and emotionally exhausted, but they also have their big performance left.

"It's a huge load you have to carry," says Richard Clark, associate professor emeritus of the UO music school and director of the academy. Armstrong teaches them how to sing, Hibbard teaches them how to move and Clark

does everything else. Clark is father, counselor, planner, cheerleader and sometimes nurse. "He allows me to be a musician," says Armstrong. "He's played bad cop. I get to be good cop."

"Be cool," Clark tells the students. "Be smart. Quiet. Attentive. And, as eight other Youth Choral Academies have done, you'll be spectacular tonight. This afternoon must be quiet time. Today, take care of yourselves."

It may be the last day, but Armstrong wastes no time. This last rehearsal is more serious, more tense. So are the students. They are visibly fatigued, slouching on the risers but sticking with it. Hibbard walks around the front of the stage. She tells them to move, to bring their faces out.

Armstrong continues polishing syllables. Then he takes a moment to look at them. "To be a musician, you have to trust," he says. "I love you. Just trust me." They sing; then he stops them. "You must not rush! One more time, straight through. Shake it baby, shake it. Shake it out."

BIG NIGHT

Backstage, the students are gathering. They seem younger dressed up than they did in jeans and flip-flops. They talk excitedly, giving hugs and helping each other with their outfits.

"Without talking, focus your energy. Breathe," says Hibbard. The students stand in rows and give each other back rubs. "Strong bodies. Strong minds. Warm hearts. Be righteous."

Armstrong comes in and leads them through some vocal warm-ups. "You're only as strong as the weakest mind. Don't be that person," he says. A few more syllables to work on, and then it's over. No more polishing. Just enough time for a pep talk.

"I want you to go out there tonight," says Armstrong, "not to impress these people but to give them the best that you are. Not to get a one for your district competition. I hate those things. When you return to your schools and go back to your choirs, you cannot go back with an attitude of superiority. Then you have not learned a thing we have taught you. Share. Don't be a know-it-all. You will be the ones not talking, the ones taking notes. Encourage others to try out for this. Take what you got in here and let it feed you."

"When we started this program, it was just for students from Lane County. After that first year, I almost thought it was not worth coming back. But Helmuth Rilling believed that every year the festival could do better. Helmuth was a maestro, but he was not arrogant about it. He built up this festival. Nine years later, you are the finest Youth Choral Academy I have taught."

"Be righteous people. Let your music lead you. Let your creativity lead you. Not destruction. Music is a means of grace. A way that you reach back into the world and create change."

"You have worked hard these 10 days. It's not so bad to work hard, is it? Look at all you have accomplished." He turns to Clark. "They're all yours," he says, and the students applaud Armstrong as he leaves for his dressing room. ♦

The tenth Youth Choral Academy performs at 7:30 pm Friday, July 6 at the First Baptist Church on Coburg Road. Tickets are \$15-\$27.

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