

SE03EP05

“Everything is Music”

Dr. Marcía Porter, Professor of Voice, FSU College of Music

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I’m Hannah

Z: And I’m Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we’ll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We’ll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

H: On today’s episode we speak with Dr. Marcía Porter, Professor of Voice for the FSU College of Music and an International Programs broad curriculum faculty member. Marcía shares about her performance career that has taken her around the globe, how she engages non-music majors in her music courses abroad, her experiences traveling as a Black woman, and more.

Hey how are you today?

Marcía (M): Oh, doing well, how are you?

H: I’m doing well, I’m really excited to talk to you today. Can you first introduce yourself to our listeners?

M: Sure, my name is Marcía Porter and I am a professor of voice in the College of Music and I teach voice and opera and I’ve been teaching abroad for FSU oh, five summers now, so yeah.

H: And what locations have you taught in?

M: I, the first three summers I taught in Spain, and then the second summers I taught in London. I was scheduled to teach in London in 2020 but I decided not to go because of all the COVID concerns.

H: Of course. We love a little variety, teaching in Spain and London. That’s awesome.

Z: So to start us off can you tell us a bit about your career and history with music?

M: So I, well let’s see, I went to high school in New Orleans, studied violin actually at a school called the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts and partway through that program switched over to singing. Graduated from Northwestern University with a Bachelors and Masters in Voice Performance and then spent about six years or so singing professionally with Lyric Opera of Chicago and doing recitals and things like that on my own. And went back to school and did a doctorate at the University of Michigan and all during that time of course doing recitals and singing with young artist programs, getting to travel abroad a few times to perform, and spent some time living in Italy to study language actually. I wasn’t performing then but studying the

language to help with performance. And so that's just a little bit I did mention I played violin for awhile I don't play that anymore.

H: What were some of the other locations where you performed internationally?

M: Oh let's see so Italy, on a second trip I went to perform, Prague, Czech Republic, I've sung in China, Brazil and I think that's it. I may be forgetting a couple of places but yes, I think that's it. The list gets kind of long and then you start forgetting things after awhile.

H: So since your courses that you teach are offered in the broad curriculum session, your students might have varied experience or interest in music. Can you talk about how you engage all of your students regardless of their background in music?

M: So what I like to do is start every class off actually playing some music and I don't always choose classical music I choose from a variety of different genres and if I find out from the students that they have a favorite performer I'll play something from that artist. I have two kids there now 12 and 15 but when they were younger I would ask my kids, "well so what do you like? Your mommy has to teach a class, what do you like? you know and they'd say "Oh mommy I like this song, oh okay." So I would play it for my students and they couldn't believe I even knew it was. So anyway, I like to start each class off playing something from the popular genre and then breaking that piece down basically to explain rhythm and harmony and thinking about text, because I'm a wordy. I like to know what I'm singing about and I like to be able to explain it. So you know when I'm in the car writing listening to music, I listen to the words first and then I decided I like the song, you know? But so I like to introduce the students first to rhythm and we talk about African drumming and we play some drumming games. And then I just take it from you know what the students are interested in learning about and trying to apply that to popular culture maybe applying it to something that's happening in world events or you know because we're in a foreign location, trying to relate that to what's going on at home, you know? So I like to go from where the students are first interested because then they'll get excited about anything else you talk about. You know so it's not trying to just bombard them with ideas of classical music and music being you know this elitist kind of thing but really breaking it down to them and say no music is it's who we are, you know everything has music in it. The switching of the windshield wipers you know creates a particular rhythm that you can then you know beatbox too that's music you know. So it's a lot of fun actually getting the students to realize that even the sounds on the street are music. I remember once my second summer in Spain I took the students to the top of one of the duomos and for some of them they had never been up there, it's a really long hike up a narrow flight of stairs but winding stairs. And so I took them up there and I said okay so now we're just going to sit. Close your eyes and just listen to all of the sounds around you, you know and see what kind of sounds do you hear? That's all music. The chirping of the birds, oh listening there is a bell ringing, oh listen you hear horns honking, oh there's someone yelling, you know. So it's a lot of fun to get them to think about music in ways other than, you know, as sheer entertainment. To think about music as a way to preserve history and to preserve culture and to tell stories you know so it's a it's a lot of fun.

Z: That sounds like an amazing course. I love that you talked about music just being all around us and that it is a way to experience another culture as well. And you talked about taking your students to the top of the duomo and we know that part of study abroad is getting to use the city as the classroom so, we want to know what are some of the highlights of the classes you've taught in the past?

M Oh let's see. So every class session I try to take them someplace different, someplace that they may not have thought to go on their own or something that they may not have done with another class. So my favorite things are just to visit parks that they may not know about. And you know again I like to take my phone and a mini speaker and you know play some examples of jazz or pop or classical music, or for in a particular park, if there's something about that park that's really special, finding a piece of music that fits the park that were in. What else have I done? Oh, I've taken them on paddle boat rides you know and talking about rhythm and music on a paddle boat. Oh, one summer in Spain this was so cool! There was, I had just spoken to the students about getting lost in the city you know just getting on a bus and riding to see where the bus goes and then getting off and coming back. You know so just taking a visit around the city that way. And this one particular week there was, I think it's Berkeley, has a campus in Valencia and this particular week the students at Berkeley were performing on buses. So my students you know they got on the bus said "Hey Dr. Porter there was a concert on the bus!" like "I know wasn't that so cool?" You know so getting lost in the city and then the added benefit of having a concert on the bus. You know so we did things like that. And let's see in London, we walked down Abbey Road. So we took a Beatles tour going to some of the places that The Beatles had performed in and hearing a little bit about the history of The Beatles and about Jimi Hendrix and things like that. And not last summer but 2019 we went on a James Bond tour so we saw one of the James bond movies, I had to choose wisely about James Bond, but anyway we found a James Bond movie that we could watch and we went around the city later in the week and saw some of the places that were highlighted in the movie. And of course you know Harry Potter studios, one summer we went there and then the next class we talked about some of the different things in the movies that, how the music related to the scenes and stuff like that. So it's just a lot of fun to really think outside of the box, if you will, with teaching people to understand the nuances of music and the need for a conductor. So let's see my first summer in London I was able to take the students to the world premiere of an opera. And I thought "Oh my gosh we are sitting in the Nosebleed seats way up high, it's hot, and the guy next to us is snoring. What is going to happen to my students? You know I thought oh for sure they're going to lose interest. But because the class before we had just talked about the roll of the orchestra conductor and how the orchestra is seated you know with all of the strings on one side and, or the high strings on one side, low strings on the other side, percussion in the back and things like that, so they understood the setup. And it was great because even though where we were sitting with way up high we could see the entire stage, we could see the entire orchestra and so at the end of the concert... Oh wait let me back up. Before we got to the theater one of the young fellas in the class, he says "Okay so Dr. Porter, am I dressed appropriately, did I wear the right clothing?" I'm like, "you look

great!" You know so they were you know, thinking about what they were even going to wear to the opera and one kid he always wore sunglasses and he says "Okay so I just want you to know that beneath these sunglasses my eyes are just jumping because I'm so excited." I said, "Okay great!" So we get to the opera we're sitting in the nosebleed seats but because they knew what was happening they were all into it, no one went to sleep, everybody was watching, they asked questions and then after the opera was done and you know everybody is applauding, when the conductor came out one of the students turned to me and said "Hey is that the conductor? He is a rock star, man that work was so hard. I get it now!" I said, "yay I won! Yay, they got it, yay check one for the teacher!" You know so it was so thrilling, so exciting. And then let's see 2019, second year in London, I took the students to see Hansel and Gretel. And it was so nice, the theater was outside and it was you know greenery all around and it was in English so that was helpful and it was the Hansel and Gretel story so they understood it but for a lot of those students you know they never even thought about going to an opera. And well why is opera important? Well you've just seen this opera that was produced so many, so many years ago but now they've brought it you know current. They've made the set design current and the clothing is current. You know and these stories we still tell them. So it was really cool. So every chance I get I try to introduce opera but I am also aware that the students are in the class to learn about other musical forms and it's just so much fun, so much fun. And as you can see I could talk a long, long time about it.

H: No even just listening to your storytelling about these experiences I feel myself getting excited because I can't even imagine what it would be like to be in that Opera House or in that audience to experience these things. And as a student learning about these things, it's a totally different experience to see it happening. To learn about it in a textbook and talk about it in class is one thing, but then to take that knowledge into the city and actually get to experience it is a whole other level of excitement and learning and just immersion into the community and the culture. So I mean I'm excited just listening to your stories, so it sounds wonderful.

M: Oh that's great and you know I wish, I'm sure you can hear the smile in my voice but my face hurts from smiling so much thinking about all of the things that you know I took the students to do, and of course there are some students who are like well why are we doing this, I don't really wanna go, but then after the fact they're like "Oh my gosh, I am so glad I came today!" And I'm like, "I'm glad you came too." So it's always really interesting to see you know their reaction, their response to the things that you're sharing with them. So I always enjoy it.

H: Yeah, it definitely sounds like it. So onto our next question. Through your experiences teaching abroad, what have you learned about flexibility and adaptability?

M: Oh my goodness so that's a huge question. So I, let's see. Preparing for the classes is always tricky. So one day you'll go to a museum, that museum is open. The next day when you're supposed to be taking your class to the museum, oh the museum is now closed. There was no signage telling you it was going to be closed the day that you wanted to go, you know. Or the signage was so small you didn't even see it, you know. But for me I taught, in Spain you basically

teach all day. So you teach a morning chunk, then you have an afternoon like chunk, three and a half hours is what I mean chunk, then you have a little time off in the afternoon and then you have another huge three and a half hour chunk. And what's challenging is some of the concerts, when do concerts happen? They happen in the evening. So being able to you know maybe switch some of the time that you would have been in the classroom and say okay we're going to come to class later today, because tonight we're all going to the opera. Or we're going to come to class later today because tonight we're going to hear this Spanish Banda play and this is an opening concert for them. You know, so being able to change the schedule around like that is sometimes it's possible, but sometimes not. It was easy to do in London to say okay well we're going to see this particular performance tonight and because we'll be out late, tomorrow morning we're going to come in late. You know, so instead of coming at 9 let's come in at 10:30. You know, so that kind of flexibility you need. Let's see, one time I again drug my students to a museum because we were talking about African music and there was this particular African museum open. Well it was around the corner from where I lived in London and I said wow I can take the students to this, well I didn't realize that it was only open certain days of the week and so we walked all the way over there in the rain, and I said "Oh my gosh!" But because I had been roaming the neighborhood to find things to do, I knew that there was another library that was open, or the British Library was open, and it wasn't very far so we went there instead. But you know it's like "Oh my gosh, oh my goodness!" Oh my favorite story. I had spent an entire day over at Buckingham Palace watching the changing of the guard and touring the gardens to see what was there and going to the horse stables just so I would know, you know where I was going the next day with the students. Well we went the following day and the changing of the guard wasn't happening. In fact, the gates that I walked through when I went the day before, were all locked and I'm standing there with my students going "Uh, uh-oh," and I said, "Well I assure you that these gates were open yesterday!" So I remembered you know, how to go around. We ended up walking like a half mile just to get in. And when we got in, instead of the changing of the guard they were doing the trooping of the colors, which was way better than the changing of the guard because the trooping of the colors had all this pageantry and music involved. And they only do the trooping of the colors for special occasions and events and the week we were there was the week before Meghan Markle and Prince Harry got married. So that's why they were doing the trooping of the colors. So I was so over the moon, excited about my mistake. You know like "Oh my goodness, this is better!" You know so we did that and then after that we've toured the rest of the grounds and everything. But it's, you really need to have flexibility because sometimes you'll think that something is open and for some reason or other it's not open or the excursion you were planning, well the students have already been to that particular place a couple of times with other classes. You know like well we could still go because there is still something important to talk about as it relates to music but let's do this instead you know. And I always like to ask the students well what have you done and what would you like to do, you know? And that way you can still get them excited about the class and you can still offer them other information that they're not going to get in another class because that class is talking about, oh I don't know economics, you know. So it's always, it's a challenge but it's a lot of fun.

Z: That's awesome. I think that that, you know, I love your story about sometimes things don't go the way you planned but then they actually turn out to be better I think that that is a common experience abroad and it's kind of those spontaneous moments that really make traveling a lot of fun.

M: Yeah and then I love you know when I don't know where I'm going, some of the students have been there for a year, you know the first year abroad students, and I can always say count on them to help. Like okay, so I'm going to tell you now I'm a little directionally challenged, so if someone knows a faster route let me know because I'm just going to use my phone and the GPS and we may get there in a timely fashion and we may not. So and even when we're walking around the city you know just talking about historical points in the city or talking about you know how this particular quarter in the city was important to the development of music or how this particular cathedral you know, where was it? Westminster Abbey! You know how that is so important in the world of music and classical music because there's so many classical composers who are you know in turn there and there are so many poets who are there you know. So just talking about all kinds of things. And I was telling Hannah, I think, did I say this to Hannah? About running and running through the cities you know and so every time I travel I try to find a race, a footrace, that I can do and in all of the summers that I've gone to Spain I think I've run maybe four or five races and my first summer in London I did what was called the Vitality 10k and we got to run through the city and there were bands playing, different kinds of music, you would pass this calypso band and then you pass a choir and then you passed I don't know a reggae ensemble. And London is such a cool city to learn music and because there are so many different cultures there and you can visit different neighborhoods where these cultures you know grew. So the Brixton neighborhood, you can go there and and go to Electric Ave and you know have some wonderful Jamaican food and there's even a Max Roach park, and Max Roach is a jazz drummer. You know and I'm going oh my gosh this is so cool and all of the popular musicians who've gone to London, you know to start their careers or just experiment with the music. It's just, oh my goodness. Again, I can go on and on and on.

Z: That's so wonderful that you know through something that you love doing like through running you're able to discover a lot of those things. And just being in the city and exploring too I think is such a great way to discover new and wonderful things.

M: And I love telling the students to get lost. You know, get lost in a nice way. Like, "no go roam around!" You know 'cause some of them, they go to the same places all the time. You know if you find that the grocery store that's close you go to that one. Like no, no but there is a better grocery store across the bridge that has all of this really cool stuff that we don't get to see in the states. You know, like a fish market with live fish you know, and all kinds of fish, fish I've not seen! So it's just it's so neat to encourage them to do that and to explore you know, maybe a different restaurant. Instead of going to this one, go to this one because they have really good food. So it's just it's all about encouraging the students to do something different.

Z: Exactly. And speaking of encouraging students, we want to ask you what advice you have for students considering studying abroad and also what advice you have for faculty who are considering teaching abroad?

M: Go for it. Just really go for it. And you know don't be afraid of not speaking the language. Right so, I taught three summers in Spain of course you can when you're in the study center there are people there who speak English because you know it's FSU students and everyone speaks English. There are a few faculty members with the Valencia program who are Spaniards and they do speak English but they prefer to not because they're there to teach the students Spanish. So it's so funny because I don't speak Spanish and I was not very concerned about roaming around Valencia because I speak Portuguese. So in Valencia there are two languages, two official languages, Valenciano and Castilian Spanish. And so which ever one the person I was speaking with, didn't speak that's what they thought I was speaking, right? So I would be speaking to someone who spoke Castilian Spanish but I'm responding to that person in Portuguese and they would ask me, "So you speak Valenciano?" I said "No, this is Portuguese." "Whatttt? Valle?" "Like yes, valle!" So Valle means like "seriously, are you kidding me?" You know, so don't be afraid to venture abroad even if you don't speak the language. I remember needing something in a store once, I'm gluten intolerant, and so needed something in a grocery store in Spain and I pointed to what I was looking for, something similar to it, and you know did all kinds of smiling and pointing and "No this is about right," touching the nose, "Yes, bingo!" And it was interesting because after that experience every time I went to that grocery store, if that particular clerk was there we would chat. And it's just, we figured out a way to chat. But yeah just don't be afraid to go. Of course now with all of the health concerns, just you know be mindful and always being mindful about you know political events and things that are happening. Because when I was in Spain one summer there was actually a huge like, riot kind of, that was happening near the study center so we had to be on alert for that and to make sure we weren't out you know for very long and everything. And I have to say you know being a black woman traveling abroad, alone you know is an interesting thing. And just wanting to encourage students of color don't be afraid. And I say that because let's see how do I say this... In London at the Jimi Hendrix museum, Handel Hendrix House, the docent was not very nice to me. And my students picked up on it, really quickly, because we had just had a discussion in class about political music. And so they picked up on it and they were so upset you know and I said, "well unfortunately I understand how this all works and why that event happened and you know it's a learning experience for you now because now you see what goes on. It's easy for you, depending on where you are, yes for you to fit into the culture whereas I will always stand out. You know and I told you I've been to Bulgaria, I don't speak Bulgarian. I even ran for miles in Bulgaria alone, you know and was I afraid? Sometimes, yes but you have to just be aware of your surroundings and you know just be smart about it don't be afraid of it and embrace you know the experiences, good and bad because even that experience in the museum with the docent I was able to explain it to the students we talked about it. Several of the students stayed you know, an hour and a half, after class talking about race issues, race in music what does it mean to be a Black American

traveling abroad. And so if you find opportunities to teach them other things, things that they would learn anyway but as you all said it's different reading it in a book and it and experiencing it first hand.

Z: Absolutely, I think that that's great advice for students and you know it's yeah I think that that's just really good to hear about your experience and we're so grateful for you coming on the podcast today and talking about your experience.

M: Oh it's been my pleasure. And I just want to encourage you know any faculty who's listening or any students who might be listening, if you have any questions about the process, for faculty the process of applying to teach abroad please reach out to me, I'd love to talk to you about it. And you know it's interesting I wrote, I've written several recommendation letters for students who were only in my summer class but because we had you know daily interaction with one another and we had the opportunity to talk one on one a lot you know, some of those students I'm still in touch with and that's really nice. So I would just encourage anyone who's listening if you're interested in either teaching abroad or studying abroad, feel free to reach out to me and just you know we can set up a Zoom, now that that's what we do, and when we're back on campus you know just stop by my office and I'd love to talk to you about it and help you figure out your own path to getting abroad because it's a wonderful, wonderful opportunity.

H: Thank you so much! Thanks for being willing to be a resource for students and for other faculty and again just thank you for sharing your story and your time with us today.

M: Oh, thank you for asking me on, it's been fun!

H: Before we disembark, we want to acknowledge Black History month by celebrating a couple of famous Black musicians.

Dr. Porter mentioned being an opera singer, and we want to highlight another Black American opera singer, Marian Anderson. Anderson sang at JFK's inauguration, was meant to sing at Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous 'I Have a Dream Speech' but was delayed in traffic, and sang in locations across Europe, debuting in London.

While Anderson had an expansive career, one of her most well-known performances was her 1939 Lincoln Memorial Concert. With more than 75,000 people in attendance and millions listening on the radio, it was not an easy event to organize. Anderson was denied permission to perform at Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution, or DAR, citing "white performers-only" policy. Furthermore, as DC was a segregated city at the time, other DC venues refused to allow her to perform. Numerous organizations and activists began to organize, creating petitions and planned protests as a result. Thousands of DAR members, including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the organization. All these events led to the concert being held on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and then five years later Anderson was invited by the DAR to perform at Constitution Hall.

Z: On a different (more psychedelic) note, Dr. Porter also mentioned visiting the Handel Hendrix House in London with her students. Jimi Hendrix is not only remembered as one of the most iconic musicians of all time, but spent time in London during his life, changing the music scene there. When Hendrix first arrived in London, it was his first time leaving North America, like many of our students today. He was impressed with London and later wrote about it saying, "It's a different kind of atmosphere here. People are more mild-mannered. I like all the little streets and the boutiques. It's like a kind of fairyland."

We hope you'll do your own research into how these artists and so many others have shaped their musical genres and made history.

H: Thanks to Dr. Porter for talking with us today and thank you to each of you for listening.

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Hannah Meister.

Resources

<https://www.allclassical.org/lost-voices-nine-black-women-who-changed-opera-forever/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Anderson

<https://www.npr.org/2014/04/09/298760473/denied-a-stage-she-sang-for-a-nation>

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/oct/26/jimi-hendrix-biopic-london-1967-changed-sound-for-ever>

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/jimi-hendrix-house-home-handel-carnaby-street-london-a9295006.html