

Music Students at Sacred Heart Academy Learn from Internationally Recognized Opera Singer, Laura Aikin

Students at Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart recently had the rare opportunity to learn first hand from world-renowned soprano, Laura Aikin. Miss Aikin, a graduate of Clarence High School, received her Bachelor Degree in Music Education from the State University of New York at Buffalo and earned her Masters Degree from Indiana University in vocal performance. Having secured a grant, Miss Aikin went on to study in Berlin, where she began her vocal career.

Miss Aikin began the afternoon workshop at Sacred Heart Academy with a brief introduction, reinforcing the importance of breath and support when studying and developing one's singing voice. Miss Aikin then provided a personal demonstration of what it looks, and feels like, when a singer is performing correctly.

Voice students, Sarah Rodman of Snyder and Mary Stottele of Lancaster, both juniors at Sacred Heart, performed and received individual coaching lessons from Miss Aikin in front of an audience of more than 50 of the school's music students. Sacred Heart's vocal program is led by Carolyn Unitas Roos, Voice Instructor and Choral Director, and Beth Quimby-Hopkins, Director of Music and Chamber Singers. Mrs. Unitas Roos and Mrs. Quimby-Hopkins are both professional musicians in Western New York.

As Sarah and Mary performed, Miss Aikin helped them make simple modifications to improve their performance while teaching the audience the importance of breath, projection, and annunciation. Incorporating Miss Aikin's recommendations, each student again performed the same song allowing the audience to hear a clear improvement.

Sarah Rodman and Mary Stottele's talents extend beyond the field of music as they both maintain a rigorous academic schedule that includes several Advanced Placement courses while consistently achieving high honor roll status. Sarah dances with Mullen Sisters School of Dance, while Mary is a member of the school's award winning Mock Trial team, sings with the Western New York Children's Choir, is president of Junior Ladies of Charity, and has performed in musical productions put on by the Lancaster Youth Bureau. Additionally, both students are regular soloists at their respective churches in Snyder and Lancaster and will take to the stage as leading female roles in the school's upcoming musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, scheduled for November 29th, 30th and December 1st.

In addition to having been given the opportunity to meet with, and learn from an accomplished international opera singer, the audience was treated to an exclusive performance by Miss Aikin, accompanied by Mrs. Quimby-Hopkins on piano. After singing “Zueignung”, a German Lied by Strauss and “O mio babbino caro” from Puccini’s Gianni Schicchi, Miss Aikin invited students to vocalize a number of exercises and concluded the workshop with questions from the audience.

The two students performing referred to Miss Aikin’s master class as an “amazing opportunity”. Junior Andrea DeRosa of Grand Island commented, “To have an opera star come to Sacred Heart and teach us was a great opportunity as we learned first-hand from a professional of her caliber.” Elizabeth Shea of Eggertsville added, “It was so helpful to watch her techniques and see the emotion she poured into every word; she was absolutely breathtaking.”

Miss Aikin’s experience, knowledge, and approachable demeanor created an atmosphere where students of Sacred Heart Academy enjoyed themselves while learning from what will likely be a once in a lifetime experience for many of them.