

Instructor Interview: Joy Katzen-Guthrie

OLLI: Joy, First of all, I have to say you're the ultimate professional. You're always punctual, organized, and even beautifully dressed. You seem to be a perfectionist. How did you develop this work ethic?

Joy Katzen-Guthrie: Thank you for your compliment. I guess I have been a perfectionist as long as I can remember – as a kid, I would get really furious with myself for making mistakes on the piano, and I will work and work on something until I feel it is as ready as I possibly can make it. I am known to spend maybe absurd hours recording and perfecting my studio work, and I never teach a class the same way twice. Every day as I discover new facts and resources, I expand and attempt to perfect my work. Organization has come naturally to me all my life, and being responsible and prepared is, for me, a basic issue of integrity that is essential in working life. As the years have passed, however, I've learned to lighten up. When I am filled with doubt over something I might not do as well as I prefer, I remind myself that it is better to take risks and fail than to avoid a potentially wonderful opportunity just because it may not turn out perfectly. I have had to accept that it is not physically possible to do all the things I used to, nor to do them technically as well at times. Yet some things still are improving. My vocal range is actually expanding as I age, rather than shrinking. My mind is nimble and my emotions more attuned. The more I learn, the more quickly I grasp new things. But I do have a theory that when you put something into your head, something else falls out! Since I constantly am adding things, I also constantly try to locate and return whatever it was that fell out!

OLLI: You have a very wide range of interests and capabilities. Tell me about them.

Joy K-G: I have a strong interest in music, art, theatre, media, and literature, read widely, listen to music in many genres worldwide, and I seek out many resources. I love travel and photography, particularly landscape and macro photography. I enjoy writing – more journalism and history than fiction, but I have loved songwriting too since I was about five. I feed off many interests, and all of those interests find their way into my creative work. I have enjoyed public speaking since I was in high school, and more recently have increased my activities as a voice-over artist. But stage fright was a serious issue in my performances until recent years, which may come as a surprise to many who have heard me or who know me. I had to overcome severe shyness when I was young, and fear that was so great that for many years I experienced complete memory blackouts when I was performing. Today I can play and sing thousands of songs and often have, at the tip of my mind, hundreds of audio-visual resources in addition to my research and stories. The ability to keep them present and clear in my mind comes from preparedness, focus, and trust that I know what I'm doing when I am presenting this material. It really has taken me much of my lifetime to learn how to do that.

OLLI: How did you come to be interested in the music and the composers that make up the bulk of your lecture material at OLLI?

As a child, I found history so exciting. I adored stories of ancient societies and especially American



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history. I began reading biography in first grade. The books I checked out from school were about Kit Carson, Daniel Boone, and Andrew Jackson, the ancient wonders of the world, and Greek and Roman history. In fiction, I was drawn to Victorian classics by Dickens, Austen, and the Brontës. I adored *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Wuthering Heights*, as much because of their historical value as the satisfaction of the stories. I also was fascinated by notable figures from modern times, such as the Kennedys. As a Jew, I have always had a strong love of Jewish culture and history. Around 2000, when I traveled to China for the first time, I became fascinated with Eastern philosophy and have devoted study to Asian and world faiths since then. All of these subjects have influenced the music I seek out, perform, and write.

Growing up, I loved listening to Broadway and film music. Seeing *The Sound of Music* in the movie house when I was about six was one of the most influential experiences in my life. I was enchanted by the singing and the power of the film and wanted to sound like that. I started playing by ear all of the show music I could find – it was exhilarating. My study of music was devoted to classical repertoire, as that was the emphasis of my instructor, but she encouraged me to play and write everything I wanted to. At Stephens College, I studied music and broadcasting, beginning my career in radio – then my chosen field – while playing piano on the side. As time passed, music replaced broadcasting as a career, and through performing in piano bars, clubs, and restaurants for some 15 years, I developed a repertoire of thousands of show tunes, popular, and folk music that I could play by request.

The teaching and lecturing I do, then, is a natural melding of all of these things; my love of history and research, intertwined with my enjoyment of public speaking, matched with the wide repertoire of music I love hearing and performing. My concerts involve telling stories about the music and composers. These varied interests have expanded my speaking and teaching to include world faiths, history, and cultures. I'll take on almost any request to teach new subjects. The result is the wide list of composers, music, culture, and history that I teach, which now numbers several dozen courses.

OLLI: I understand that you also have a recording business. What's that all about?

I was blessed to partner with a man whose passion is sound and recording. My husband – whom I met within months of moving to Florida while working in radio in 1981, and whom I married in 1983 – continues his work in broadcast systems integration – the design and integration of broadcast, studio, and other sound systems and engineering. Though not a musician, he is a lover of music and recordings, and even before we were married, he was designing a recording studio for me. From a four-track facility, we expanded to 8-track, 16-track, and then to a Pro Tools digital studio. I released cassettes, then CDs; we had so many requests for our studio that we began making it available to others. Now we have a number of local artists recording with us, and our business provides sound and recording for live concerts and events as well.