Ep #88: On Saying Yes and Trusting Your Work



Full Episode Transcript

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Your voice is unique to you. It grows as you grow. It changes as you change. If you're curious about the relationship between your voice and your body, your heart and your mind, welcome. My name is Michèle Voillequé and I can't wait to hear you.

I have two stories today. One is about being recruited for a task, and the other is about wanting desperately to be chosen.

So about being recruited. In 2005, I was asked to start a youth and children's choir at the church where I was a member. The choir director first approached the alto section leader and said, “Would you start a youth and children's choir? The Board of Trustees would really like that to happen.”

There had been a youth and children's choir at the church years before that was a huge success. And then, you know, people get older and times change and people move on and there was a feeling like, “It would be so great if we could have a kids choir again.”

And the alto section leader said, ‘No, but you know who you should get to do it is Michèle.”

So the choir director's next stop was to ask me and I said, “Okay?” And then we started.

One of the things that made me a good choice was that I already had two children of my own. So I had a starter pack for the choir and he knew that I was a good singer. He didn't know that I didn't have any training in teaching music to children, but, that was my first stop actually, was to figure out how do you teach children music?

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I had sung with younger Girl Scouts when I was a Girl Scout. I had taught Brownies how to do things, you know. I had done some of that in my life, but I didn't know anything rven about being in a children's choir 'cause I'd never been in one. I'd never seen that happen.

So I quickly acquired a Kindermusik Education and License. That's a company that offers early childhood music and movement education for kids, zero – at the time it was zero to seven, maybe it still is. And I taught Kindermusik for several years and really enjoyed it.

They're not sponsoring this podcast, but if you are somewhere and you have some littles and you'd like to take a music class with them, Kindermusik is a great program. Really developmentally appropriate.

I learned a lot about how the human being grows and acquires music, or expresses their own innate musicianship, by becoming a Kindermusik educator, and I think it's a great thing.

And the other thing I did that summer was to start my Orff Schulwerk Levels Training. Carl Orff is a composer, German composer, who is probably most famous for having written Carmina Burana. He partnered with, an educator Gunild Keetman, and they developed a philosophy, not so much a curriculum but a philosophy of how to teach music to children.

And there are Orff Schulwerk Associations across the planet – there's an American Orff Schulwerk Association – and they have a series of, they call it Levels Trainings. So there are three Levels. I did all three. There are post-Levels trainings I've done. A handful, not a handful, two or three of them. And that, too, was a great foundation for me to learn how to work with kids and also how to compose with children.

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That was one of the great things that we did together, was, we wrote some of our own songs and shared them in worship.

And that foundation of singing and playing instruments and moving all at the same time – sing, dance, play – really helped us achieve a kind of cohesion as a group. It really grew the kids as musicians and we achieved, a, I don't know, a togetherness that I don't think would've been possible if I hadn't had that education.

There are Orff Schulwerk teachers all throughout the public schools and private schools. It's possible to get an Orff Schulwerk education in America as just part of your regular elementary school music experience and that, too, I would highly recommend.

It's a group kind of a thing, so you're not likely to find a private Orff Schulwerk instructor, but that, too, I give two thumbs up. And the trainings that I received at the San Francisco School, they made me a better human, not just a better musician. They made me a better human.

But as for being a better musician, that grew me musically in ways that I don't, I don't think anything else could. If you're a musician and you're looking for a growth experience, I highly recommend the training. It's a lot of fun and it's a lot of hard work, but it is, it is so good. It was so good for me, and I think it would be good for you, too.

So I'm asked to start this youth and children's choir and I go and get this training and you know, I'm still, not scared to death, that's maybe overstating it, but I'm nervous. I have never done this before.

At the church, I had been in leadership positions before. I had served on the Board of Trustees. I had co-chaired a long range planning committee. I had worked on a capital co-chaired, a capital campaign steering

committee. You know, I had my bonafides, as a nonprofit, volunteer, organizational development kind of a geek. I was really good at that.

But I knew that I didn't know what I was in for starting this choir, and very luckily for me, the organist at the time was a woman named Sandra Soderlund and she had also started a youth and children's choir when her children were small.

She knew the drama or the, the growth that I was in for, not just in leading a group of kids, a kind of group that I had never led before, but also a group that had my own family members in it. And she was just such, the word that's coming is just such a support for me.

Like, I could roll my eyes and she would know exactly what was going on with me and. like, she knew, I felt like she was in the trenches with, she knew exactly the trench I was in. And she was happy she wasn't in it anymore, but she knew. She knew.

And that just made a world of difference, to have a compatriot, to have a mentor, to have somebody nearby who's walked the path ahead of you, who can point out the potholes that you're likely to encounter and can be there to commiserate with you because they've, that's a road that they've walked.

They know it in a way that other people who haven't tried to do that particular thing, that they don't know.

So one of the potholes she alerted me to was that Easter's really hard, because it's all about the egg hunt. So the congregation wants the youth and children's choir to sing in the Easter service because wouldn't that be adorable?

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And yes, of course it is adorable, but, like, who can focus on Easter morning in the worship service? Everybody is thinking about the egg hunt.

And she told me how she solved this problem for herself was that she let her choir know that there would be a prize for everyone who correctly counted the number of Hallelujahs that were sung or spoken in the worship service.

She was working for Episcopalians, and I think just in general, they have a whole lot more Hallelujahs on Easter than Unitarian Universalists do, where I was working. But the UUs were still gonna have a fair number of Hallelujahs. And that was just, it was just wonderful advice. And it, it worked to focus the kids, to keep them engaged in the worship service and just to help the day go better.

But the greater life advice that I took from that was, “Count the Hallelujahs.”

There is always gonna be a thing that does not feel good. There's always going to be pain and suffering, things that we said that we wished we hadn't, things that we didn't say that we wish we had.

People are gonna disappoint us. Wrong notes are gonna be played. There’s gonna be not-Hallelujah happening pretty much in every, every day there's gonna be some not-Hallelujah happening. But the important thing is to count the Hallelujahs and let that help keep you going.

It's our job to notice the good, notice the miraculous, notice everything that's going right and feed that with our attention.

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I have received so many gifts from Sandra Soderlund, but that's one that I, that came because I was recruited and because I didn't say, "No." Because I said, "Yes."

Someone saw something in me and not having seen it in myself at all – This was not a job that I wanted. This was not a job that I aspired to. This was not a job that I ever thought would exist in my life, but I was asked to do it and I said, "yes," and I figured out how to do it, and it enriched my life.

That saying, "Yes" has made me a completely different person. I would not be who I am today if I had not been recruited to do that.

And I'm willing to bet that you have a story like this in your own life, too, where somebody saw something in you that you didn't see in yourself and you just decided to agree with them. You just decided to say, "What the hell? Maybe. Okay. I'll try it."

And I imagine, well, you can let me know. You can send me an email. Let me know if you're a better person for it, if you like the way that your life changed as a result of that "yes."

Let me be more explicit about that. I would not be a singing teacher today had I not been recruited to start a youth and children's choir, I think. Or my path to teaching singing would've been very different and my approach to teaching singing would be very different. And there wouldn't be this podcast.

There wouldn't be so much of my life's work if I had said, "no" to that, request.

The other story I have about wanting desperately to be chosen is actually a collection of stories.

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I remember going to casting calls, getting all dolled up, warmed up, ready to be asked to cold read for this or that part, – and everybody's in the same room, right? – and not being asked to read, not even getting to put my foot on the stage because they were looking for somebody with a different look.

They were looking for somebody who didn't look like me, 'cause they couldn't know how I sounded. They couldn't know how I was, would've read for them, what I would've brought to the part. But I wasn't chosen because of how I looked and this happens a lot.

This happened a lot to me. It happens a lot to other people. This happened a lot, and at some point – I think I had probably been listening to Marianne Williamson give a lecture on *A Course in Miracles*. This is way back in the 1990s.

And I remember deciding, the next time I went to an audition where I knew that I had a specific audition time. I was at least going to get, to be seen, I mean, to demonstrate what I had. That I was going to go into that five minutes that I was given, not with the energy of "like me, like me, like me," but with the energy of, "I have a gift for you. Here's my gift for you. Here's 32 bars of a song, and I really hope it makes your day better. I know," thinking to myself, "audition days are long and hard."

And if you are the person listening to all the others auditioning, right, your ears get tired. Your brain gets tired. You hear a lot, and a lot of it isn't what you want. Like, it's just, it's a hard day.

And so I decided to go into my audition with the thought, "Let this make your day better. I've prepared this thing for you. Let it help you in some way." And it completely changed my relationship to auditioning.

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I started seeing it as my opportunity to give a gift rather than my opportunity to feel bitterly rejected. And I think thinking of it as my opportunity to give a gift is the better play, is the stronger play, is the one that grows me as a performer, because in that I'm owning all of my capacity.

I'm owning all of my musicianship, I'm owning all of my nervousness, all the feelings that I have, all the joy that I have, all the desire that I have for this part. I'm owning all of that, and I'm channeling it into being of service to the person listening to me, rather than letting that feel just like a bunch of fluster, internal kerfuffle, unfocused anxiety about me and my worth, and am I talented and all of these really boring questions.

I say "really boring questions," they're actually harmful questions. They're actually questions that I can only ask when I have forgotten the truth about myself, which is that I am worthy. I do belong on the planet. There is a use for my gifts available now.

It might not be in this specific way that I'm auditioning for, this thing that I really want, but there is a use for my gifts right now.

And I happen to believe that we are all talented. We all have talents. That's something that comes with being a human being. We might not be precisely talented in the way that we wish we were, but that doesn't mean that you don't have talent.

So about the time that I figured out that my audition was a gift to the people that I got to sing for, or that I got to read for, I started working with an acting coach whose name was Donna Davis, and she cast me in several things that she was directing, and taught me so much about acting, about life.

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Doesn't every actor say that, that acting is life, life is acting. But it's true. It's true.

She taught me so much about how to create a character, convey a character, and to be a grounded and honest and focused person. It was just tremendous.

One of the things that she said before, maybe before every opening night, but I'm just remembering one particular opening night, maybe this was the first time I heard her say it.

She said, we've spent weeks preparing a cake, perfecting the recipe, figuring out how to ice it, to present this beautiful gift to the audience. "Look, this beautiful cake that I've prepared for you." And she said, but what you're likely to feel because, and not all of this came out of her mouth verbatim this way. This is me explaining it.

But she said, you're gonna drop a line. You might forget an entrance. Things are not going to go as planned. We've spent weeks and weeks perfecting this recipe so that by the end of the evening we will be able to present a perfectly delicious and decorated cake to the audience, and you will feel like what you ended up giving was basically crumbs.

And she said, "The crumbs are enough."

The crumbs are enough. Trust your work. Trust all of the work that you've done, and know that even as you may disappoint yourself, they are gonna be amazed. Trust that they will receive the crumbs as the cake you had intended.

I think this is just such a great example, or a great way to say that when we focus on what's immediately in front of us: the music we need to learn, the lines we need to learn, the thing we need to do. When we give

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all of ourselves to that task and not fixate on whether or not they're gonna like it, that “What if?” wondering, “Are they gonna like it?" If we can get out of, “Are they gonna like it?” and just put our energy into making it the most beautiful, clear, honest thing we can, then that's enough and that's what matters.

I had a conversation with a young musician once who was hoping to get an audience with a particular teacher because she wanted to find out if she “had what it took.” Music was really important to her. She loved making music. She loved being in a group making music. She was feeling like, “This feels like my life's work, and this teacher is somebody who could tell me reliably whether it's worth my time, whether I should continue to pursue this, whether it's gonna be worth it.”

And what I said, and what I stand by today, is please don't put the worth of your endeavor in the hands of someone else. That teacher may be a phenomenal teacher. They may know a ton about the industry. They may have “made stars.” They may have “birthed careers” for people. They may be all of that.

But they can't know what's in your heart. They can't know the dream you're holding. They can't know everything that's inside of you. They can't know your tenacity. They can't know you.

You'll go and you'll play some scales for them and you'll play a piece for them, and then they will, they'll rate you like that's what you're, that's what you're asking for. “Please tell me on a scale of one to 10, am I gonna make it as a musician?”

But making it as a musician happens every day. It happens with what you do with yourself after you wake up in the morning every single day. And no person outside of you is gonna know whether you have what it takes.

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Only you know, this is the dream I have, this is the goal I have. This is what I really want. This feels authentic to me. This feels like I'm meant to be doing it. You are the only one who knows that.

And don't let anybody else try to talk you out of it.

Now, you may have no idea what your path in life is actually gonna look like. I certainly didn't. I was just going along, being a good little lay leader in a church, singing in the choir, taking voice lessons, enjoying learning more about my voice.

You know, I had been a violinist. I had put that down. I decided to take up singing. I did that. It was going well for me. I was, you know, doing little things here and there in the community, at the church, whatever. And then, “Hey, could you please start a youth and children's choir?”

And now here I am, 21 years later with a huge body of work, hundreds and hundreds of people I have taught, friends I never would've made, just experiences I never would've had if I had said, “no” to that. I could not have predicted anything about my life today, 21 years ago. Could not have done that.

And so, I guess today's podcast has a couple of messages.

One, if you're recruited or attempted to be recruited, if somebody asks you to do something that you have never really considered, and at first it doesn't make any sense, but then you think, “Well, maybe I do have the skillset for this, or if I don't entirely have the skillset for it, I know how I could get it. And that sounds like it could be fun,” they have seen something in you that you haven't seen in yourself, and that is such a gift to have your life utterly derailed.

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Is that what I just said? It's a gift to have your life completely redirected by a “yes.”

And a corollary:

If you're on a path, if you're following your heart and all of a sudden you feel like you need to get the blessing of some kind of gatekeeper, you need somebody else's permission to continue to dream whatever you're dreaming, that's a call to stop and reflect, for yourself.

Because I really believe nine times outta 10, that desire to get permission from somebody else is really just our own fear getting in our way. And what we need at that moment is not somebody else's blessing, but somebody else's mentorship.

We need someone who sees in us more than we can see in ourselves. Someone who can show us where the potholes in the road are, sure, but not somebody who's gonna tell us that road isn't for us.

I might be that mentor for you.

If you think that might be true, click the link in the show notes to schedule a free consultation or just send me an email and let's figure it out.

Thank you so much for listening.

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