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### The Lady in Pink

“The judges of the Schmidt Youth Vocal Competition have decided to admit four participants instead of three as listed for my master class due to the unanimous support for one of the participants,” announced the adjudicator who was dressed from head to toe in bubble gum pink. I was excited and yet a bit confused at the same time because I had no idea what a master class was. Even though I did not walk away with any awards, I would go home with the confidence and inspiration to actually pursue music seriously.

Gabrielle Baker, a short redhead with a tight all-black dress was the first to go up on stage for her master class with the lady clad in pink. Dr. Randall (I finally found the pink lady’s real name in the program) made Gabrielle do all sorts of odd things *while* singing. As the two of them played tug-of-war with a sheet of rubber and sung “Think of me” from *Phantom of the Opera*, I remembered that my own voice teacher Joanna made us stroke our faces with a Japanese brush or feather while vocalizing. Also, my choir teacher makes us say the most peculiar things in warm-ups, like “Mama made me mash my M&M’s...I cried” to some standard tune. I guess voice teachers in general have to be eccentric and innovative to be effective!

After two more participants had finished their master classes, it was my turn. Dr. Randall had me perform my second piece, “Bring Him Home” from *Les Miserables*. Before I even got past the second line, she stopped me to work on projecting my voice. After making “cat” noises and vocalizing on the word *kitty*, she finally diagnosed my problem being singing like a choir

student (which I was) and not like a soloist. She had me speak the text as if I were in conversations with her and then sing it as such. The moment my first note came out of my mouth, I was shocked at how much sound was coming out of me. It was echoing through my head and making a ringing that I had never experienced. Towards the end of the song, she grabbed my hand and walked me to the edge of the stage where we spread our arms out like idiots. At this point, I did not care about how ridiculous I looked; I was too busy trying to comprehend the sound coming out of me.

I left the competition with many new things learned: First, a master class is basically a public voice lesson with a spastically-enthusiastic teacher who is more than willing to improve your technique. Second, that my “distinct” voice was more than a choir liability: It could be my distinguishing trait that sets me apart from the competition when I go professional. Last, and most importantly, I learned to love my sound, not hide it. It is a part of me, changing, growing, working some days, getting on my nerves on worse days, but it will always be with me. I now look forward to the master classes that my friends all groan at the thought of, for each one is a stepping stone to achieving my goals musically. I sometimes even forget that the whole event was a competition with nearly \$10,000 at stake. What I always see in my memory is the lady in pink with all her enthusiasm; the enthusiasm that I as a singer can put into practice.