

Musical Collaboration

Faculty Member Kathryn Southworth



Growing up in Vermont, Kathryn Southworth was part of a musical family. In the summertime, her family would gather on the front porch of their lakehouse to play music together. Her father played the piano, her brothers played guitar, and there was plenty of singing, which floated across the lake on summer evenings.

“People got used to us doing that, so they’d go out in their boats on the lake to listen to us,” she recalls.

For Southworth, now chair of the Piano Department at the Music School, making music has always been a communal event. When she was in fifth grade, she started playing piano for a small singing group. Soon she was accompanying student recitals, a choir, and school musicals.

“I’d always played with other people,” she says. “It was dyed in the wool at that point. I never really got the bug to be a solo pianist. Solo playing, for somebody like me, feels so solitary.”

She remembers the first time she accompanied a singer during her college years at Oberlin Conservatory, when someone asked her to play during a private voice lesson. “It was just such a beautiful sound, and I kind of melted into the piano. And I thought, ‘I could get used to this.’”

Fresh out of graduate school, with a degree in vocal accompanying and coaching, Southworth learned about a newly minted community music school in Concord, New Hampshire. She met with founder Peggy Senter and thought, “I wish I had something like this when I was growing up.”

She joined the faculty, and found that she loved teaching—and having professional musicians as colleagues. Here, she could collaborate to her heart’s content. “The Music School was this home base of other professional musicians. Anywhere else in New Hampshire, people were spread hither and yon.”

Plus, Southworth says, working at the Music School gave her the chance to pursue a serious music career in the rural setting that she loves. “This is really ideal for me,” she says. “I have the best of both worlds. I can live in this beautiful state, but I can still perform with people who care as much about music as I do, and who are very much on top of their craft.”

Over the years, Southworth has seen a number of ambitious projects through from concept to completion in the Piano Department, such as the Integrated Arts Recital, in which students showcase original poetry and artwork alongside their musical pieces; faculty-taught workshop weeks that cover everything from sight-reading to playing by ear; and a weekend of Feldenkrais Method classes, which explore the mind-body relationship in piano playing.

A collaborative artist at heart, Southworth has been glad to see more ideas and events shared between different departments, which she says is happening more and more.

But the sense of connection through music, which has always been integral to her musical life, has remained constant through the years. “For each student, there are several teachers in the building that know the student by name,” she says. “They’ve watched them grow up. That level of personal connection hasn’t changed.”