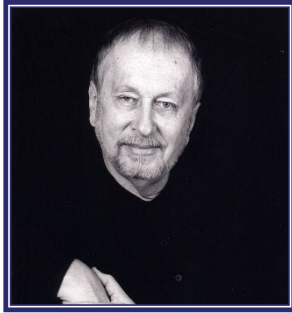


# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* TEACHERS *of* SINGING



## PAUL KIESGEN

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By Brian Manternach

Paul Kiesgen was professor of music at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music where he taught studio voice and graduate courses in vocal pedagogy. He traveled the world in his career as performer and pedagogue and wrote for *Journal of Singing* (for which he served as a member of the editorial board), *Choral Journal*, *Vox Humana* (the official journal of the German Voice Teaching Association), and *Classical Singer* magazine. His lectures and masterclasses were widely acclaimed both in the United States and in his frequent appearances abroad. As a member of the American Academy of Teachers of Singing and the Chicago Singing Teachers Guild, and as a past national vice president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, he brought a spirit of curiosity to his teaching alongside a wealth of knowledge and experience. During my own doctoral studies, I had the privilege of taking two vocal pedagogy courses from Professor Kiesgen and was an officer in our campus chapter of Student NATS, which he led as faculty adviser.

In 2002, Professor Kiesgen published an article in the *Journal of Singing* entitled "To Listen or Not to Listen," which discussed whether it is advantageous or not to listen to one's own voice while singing. As musicians, and certainly as teachers, we understand that one of the most important skills to practice is that of listening. But, as he clarifies in the article, "Perhaps the question should not be whether or not to listen, but rather how to listen." While he said and wrote much that was worth remembering, rereading these words brought to mind all the things Professor Kiesgen helped me to hear that were never spoken.

*Treat others with kindness (even if you're a big shot).*

Professor Kiesgen always treated us, his students, as though we were colleagues. He was never condescending, never allowed us to feel buried by the subject matter, and gently encouraged us to keep at it by complementing our strengths. The first time I ever considered submitting an article for publication, I sought his advice on whether it was worthy of print. Without hesitation he boomed in his large bass voice, "Of course!" When I remained unconvinced due to my student status and relative lack of credentials, he retorted with a

laugh, "Who do you think writes these articles? It's people like you, so you might as well beat them to it!"

*Be generous with your time.*

In 2005, Professor Kiesgen offered to teach a required pedagogy class during the summer session for those of us who needed it to meet our planned timeline for graduation. When just four of us signed up, he still went forward with the class, knowing how important it was for us so that we could get out into the professional world and get on with our lives in a timely manner. As you might imagine, due to the small size of the class, each meeting provided us the opportunity to ask the questions that would help us best understand the material and to engage in conversation with a great and gracious mind.

*Keep learning, whenever and wherever you can.*

Professor Kiesgen was constantly seeking ways to improve his teaching. He was usually the first to bring new technology into his studio and was always happy to "talk shop," which led to many an impromptu discussion in the halls. He could summarize the main points of hundreds of pedagogy books (even the ones in which the science has been discredited) and he told great stories about what he learned in conversation with the likes of Giorgio Tozzi and Richard Miller.

While giving feedback after observing a voice lesson I had taught, he complimented me on the way I explained a particular concept and said, "I'm going to steal that and use it with my own students." He must have noticed my look of surprise because he continued, "What? It was effective. Am I supposed to be too proud to learn from a student?"

*Try your best even though you may not be the best.*

At the end of class one day, Professor Kiesgen offhandedly mentioned that he had an appointment later with his personal trainer. When pressed for details he exclaimed, with his typical grin, "Well, you don't have to be good at something to enjoy doing it!"

In the years since I finished school and left campus, I hadn't stayed in touch with Professor Kiesgen the way I had planned. As a teacher myself, I didn't want to intrude on his attention and deprive his new students of the opportunity to learn from him as I had. So I would check in on occasion and always enjoy our brief but pleasant exchanges, picking up where we left off. I know that part of me was also waiting to land a big and splashy job or to have some other monumental career opportunity that I could share with him to confirm the confidence he had in my abilities, which always seemed to surpass my own.

Sadly, his passing has reminded me of yet another important lesson . . .

*Music, and musicians, must communicate.*

If we're not communicating, if we're focused too much on accomplishment, or if we're too caught up in the minutia of our own lives to stay in touch with others, we're missing the point.

To listen or not to listen. While I have not heard Paul Kiesgen's voice for some time now, I still listen to all he has taught me. And because of him, so do my students.

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