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Prof-file:

Aracena Finds Inspiration in Music, Disney

By Noelle Selb
Staff Writer

It is a popular belief that food is the easiest way to any man’s heart. Likewise, Professor Beth Aracena finds that the easiest way to win over her students’ minds is through pop culture and a little inspiration from Walt Disney.

Aracena, who came to EMU a few years ago from a community music school in Washington, D.C., is an assistant professor of music who, as a child, taught of instruments as playthings.

Aracena grew up in Connecticut in the same area where Paul Newman, Rodney Dangerfield, and Martha Stewart lived. With three older brothers and a younger sister, Aracena used music to deal with her emotions.

“My music helped me cope with being in what I perceived as a large family,” she admitted.

Music was not in her family’s blood, though, and it often took much persuasion for Aracena to convince her family to let her pursue her passion.

While most children beg their parents for a puppy, pony, or a Power Wheel, Aracena just wanted piano lessons. Her persistence paid off, though, because she got her wish after a few years of trying.

Piano playing was only the beginning, and she soon caught on to a stringed instrument. “I started playing violin because my older brother had played,” Aracena said, adding, “institutions in strings was available in anyone starting in the fourth grade in my public school system.”

But along with instruments comes hours of practice. Diligently, Aracena had to learn her music amongst a family that did not quite grasp the energy she put into her playing. She even said that her brothers, “used to yell at me to stop making such a racket when the piano echoed throughout the house... My parents were convinced there was something wrong with me, that it was unhealthy to spend so much time alone in my room.”

Aracena believes in individual effort and hard work and therefore sets high standards in her classes. “I want each of my students to achieve their potential,” Aracena explained. “My favorite aspect of teaching, then, is the individual learning that I see taking place. I strive to foster individual growth, and to let that process be joyous. I am really very proud of my students.”

Her care for each individual student stems from her high school piano teacher who, “insisted on teaching music not piano.” I would [spend] hours with her playing, talking about, and listening to music,” Aracena said.

While working at a donut shop to pay for her lessons, she would bring the leftover pastries to her professor’s house, often referred to as the Peaceable Kingdom.

The donor would be delighted, not only by human means, but by the raccoons the professor fed.

“She adopted every stray cat near her house and used to name them after opera characters. There was Pagano (from ‘The Magic Flute’), Figaro, Idomeneo, and 1 g m u n d,” Aracena said. Donors would often help her out, sometimes with the influence of this woman who had ten cats at one time.

This selection of thought-provoking music does not mean that Aracena has lost her childhood, though. Instead, she still wants to fulfill her youthful dreams to be a ballerina.

Her daughter often asks her what her favorite movie is, and Aracena honestly chooses Mulan. "I like Mulan because there’s a lot of humor (Eddie Murphy does the voice of the dragon), and Mulan overcomes so many personal and cultural obstacles to find herself. It’s beautiful,” Aracena said.

Whether it is because she grows non-blooming orchids or because she considers a cartoon to be so inspirational, Aracena’s life shows that historical music can be very relatable. With a little bit of help from Orville Redenbacher, this professor motivates her students from the strength of her love for music.

Hugs and Slugs

A hug to people who pick up hitchhiking college students over spring break. We’re not so scary after all, are we?

A soggy slug to the weather in Hilton Head over spring break, which ruined out tennis games. The game just isn’t as fun when the ball squishes every time you hit it.

A grateful hug to everyone who told us they liked this semester’s Feather Brain, and a sympathetic one to those who didn’t. Honestly, it’s not meant to be taken seriously.

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