

Ariel May is in harmony with Canyon High choir

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“Viva! Viva! Viva!”



It's a sleepy Monday morning. Canyon High's first year a cappella choir is awake—preparing for their spring concert. Inside, centered at the front of the room, first year Canyon teacher, Mrs. Ariel Lambrecht-May leads students through daily vocal exercises. She conducts the class with her arms. Her movements create a language for her students; they react with vocal oscillations—working to “stretch their vocal chords.” There are no instrumental aides but the sound of others, a crucial element to a cappella, or chamber music.

For this group, singing starts their typical school day. Their o period class was once a lunch club for vocal enthusiasts, created and facilitated by Ariel Lambrecht-May. Along with her a cappella class, Mrs. May teaches treble clef, mixed, and advanced choir.

A MUSICAL PATH

Ariel Lambrecht-May began her musical career young—she began to play the piano at the age of four. Music and leadership would follow her. “I grew up with a lot of siblings, so I've always been a leader with them. In high school, I had a choir director that made my life meaningful,” Mrs. May explains with a smile. “I became section leader in high school and knew I wanted to be a teacher.”

After high school, she went on to earn a Bachelor of Music Education (Vocal Emphasis) from Chapman University. At Chapman, Lambrecht-May founded Chapman's premier cappella group. She was also president of the American Choral Director's Association (ACDA) collegiate chapter. In 2014, she



graduated from the University of California, Irvine with a Masters in Teaching Music. Mrs. May has extensive experience in vocal teaching and conducting master classes with classical, jazz, and musical theater repertoire. Along with teaching, Mrs. May participates in choral ensembles within Orange County and Los Angeles. "She's almost overly qualified," jokes August Gweon, a member of a cappella.

MUTUAL COLLABORATION WITH STUDENTS

In a typical a cappella class, students begin with vocal warm ups. "We have a wide array of vocal warm ups," Sean Raus says. "When we hold our hands to our face, our mouth creates an open sound, rather than a hard, solid, impure one."

After warm-ups, students precede to practice singing. Mrs. May listens—intently, guiding the tone of their voices with her arms. The choir is in perfect harmony. However, Mrs. May has the students stop.

"Repeat after me, 'flaws,'" She sings. She identified one word to have a slight anomaly, and has her students pause to practice this word.

"Flaws," her class sings.

"I have flaws, you have flaws." Mrs. May grins.

Throughout the class, Mrs. May pauses when she hears any deviation. Her ears are sharp; she teaches her students to identify the differences in their voices.

Mrs. May's students appreciate her focus.

"She's a perfectionist, and that's a good thing in music. I prefer that approach, and she does it in an open and understanding way. It's refreshing," says Hana Hassanpourgol. "She's approachable, which is important in music. You want everything to be in harmony, literally. It's good to have someone like her directing you where she doesn't shoot down your ideas."

"She's like a person more than a teacher," Sean adds.



Mrs. May has made clear personal connections with her students. When asked to share how they joined the choir department, the pair is eager to share.

"I joined choir because I liked to sing. But it's more than just a class to me; Now I want to go to Cal State Fullerton and get a major in music. I'd love to teach music because of Mrs. May," Sean explains.

For Hana, choir was where she could fit in. "I moved here from out of state and I felt out of place. This year, I heard Mrs. May make an announcement about a cappella auditions and she told me to audition. I was fortunate enough to be one of those people to make it. Since then, it's been an amazing experience and I've learned a lot and grown more as a singer."

In her first year at Canyon High School, Mrs. May has changed the culture of the choir program. What once was a lunch time get-together, now is a rigorous class that demands students to give an "extra push" to succeed.

"Before she came, there was no complex choir. It was just singing." Sean says. Now, choir is more than just singing; The students are learning and collaborating in each class, with a brilliant teacher to light the way.

Mrs. May reflects, "It would bring me a lot of joy to see my students leave with more self assurance, confidence, and tolerance for people who are different. These are things we learn in music—Changing, transforming, and building each other up while building ourselves up."