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Vocal instructor Diana Segara, left, works with student Jenna Kuchar, 14, in a studio/performance space in Segara's garage.

# a life of *harmony*

Vocal coach Diana Segara pursued her dream of becoming a singer, then a teacher

BY ERIC BILLINGSLEY  
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**W**hen Diana Segara was 7 years old, she had a life-defining moment. At a friend's birthday party, the birthday girl sat down at the piano, broke out in song and all the other children sang along.

The spontaneous power of that moment sparked a desire in Segara to sing, perform and pursue other forms of artistic expression.

"I felt like, 'Wow, this (is) it,'" says Segara. "I think it was the performing, moving people and making them laugh or cry."

Segara, now 60, is a certified singing and drama teacher who works out of her Northeast Albuquerque home. Any given week she works with upward of 90 students, ranging from those learning to sing for the first time to seasoned performers looking to hone their vocal abilities.

Kelly Kuchar, whose daughter, Jenna, 14, began taking vocal lessons from Segara when she was 11 years old, says Segara is more than a teacher.

"Diana is one of Jenna's most significant adults in her life," says



Diana Segara instructs upward of 90 students per week out of her home in Northeast Albuquerque. Here, Segara, right, works with Jenna Kuchar, 14, who started at age 11.

Kuchar. "Diana sees the best in people. She's totally a mentor as a singing instructor, and she's a friend."

## A difficult path

Pursuing her desire to perform, and eventually instruct, hasn't always been easy for Segara. As a

child, she didn't have access to formal instruction but benefited from the influence of her mother, a semi-professional singer. Later, she contended with her own insecurities about being able to teach.

But, she says, the experiences helped her develop a simple

philosophy.

"Everyone deserves to sing if they really want to," she says. "You need people along the way to believe in you and make you feel special in whatever it is you're doing."

Born in New York City, Segara, the older of two siblings, was raised in Queens and Manhattan. She says the Catholic grammar school she attended provided little access to extracurricular activities in the performing arts. And her family didn't have the money for private lessons.

"The interest was there, but the only way I was exposed to music was through my mother, who loved opera, and by listening to the radio," she says.

Segara's first opportunity to perform came in high school. Despite the school being "fairly rough" and having a poor music department, she says, it had a great drama program. That fueled her interest in performance, she says, but it didn't give her much of an outlet for music.

She went on to obtain a bachelor's degree in speech education and drama (1969) and then a master's

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degree in communication theory and media (1972) from Queens College City University of New York. During college she also began singing professionally with acoustic, folk and rock bands, even though she had no formal vocal training.

"That was it for me; I absolutely loved it and wanted to do it all of the time," says Segara.

## Key influences

Her role models are Barbra Streisand, for belting — being able to hold notes forever; Maria Callas, for expression; Liza Minnelli and her mother, Judy Garland, for their heart and soul; Kathleen Battle, for vocal quality; Peggy Lee, for her phrasing; and Ella Fitzgerald, for her scat technique and straightforward singing.

Segara's mother, a single parent, was another key influence.

"My mother was really happy when she was singing, and on some level I keyed into that and wanted that happiness for myself," says Segara, adding she found out later in life that her grandmother was also a singer.

In 1976 she moved to Boston and began a seven-year stint taking private vocal



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**Diana Segara has two studios, a performance space, digital recording system, digital voice analysis capabilities and access to Internet music downloads in her home.**

instruction at the New England Conservatory, considered one of the oldest independent music conservatories in the U.S. During that time she worked as a counselor and college instructor, singing professionally on the side. She often performed with her husband, Daniel Mahony, whom she met in 1981 and

married in 1982.

## The teaching bug

In 1986, she obtained certification from the National Association of Teachers of Singing to instruct. She says Mahony was a major source of motivation behind her decision to become a vocal instructor.

"I always wanted to become

a singing teacher but never thought it was possible," says Segara. "I think the important thing for me is that I was true to myself even though it took me longer to get my credentials."

The couple ran the Ipswich Voice Studio in Ipswich, Mass., from 1983 to 1993. Then they moved to Tralee, Ireland,

where Segara worked as a college instructor and opened her current business, The Singing Centre. Mahony worked as a musician and teacher of developmental psychology.

While living in Tralee, she performed and began composing music. To date, she has produced three CDs and four volumes titled "Songs for Poems of the Spirit."

The couple moved to Albuquerque and opened their business in 2004. She says they chose New Mexico because they were tired of the weather in Ireland, looking for a sunny and peaceful place to live, and real estate prices were good at the time.

Segara and Mahony run The Singing Centre together. Their business has two studios, a digital recording system, a performance space, digital voice analysis capabilities and access to Internet music downloads. They recently launched Internet-based lessons that are done via Webcam.

Segara is a coloratura soprano — a high-pitched, fast-singing soprano. She sings solo in Handel's "Messiah" with the East Mountain Community Chorus, with the choral ensemble of Opera Southwest, and produces and performs in the metro area.

## Blossoming talent

Kelly Kuchar says her daughter has blossomed since starting vocal instruction with Segara.

She takes private instruction, performs with other students at The Singing Centre, recently took an acting workshop from Segara in which all of the kids wrote and performed their own play, and has cut her own CD.

"Every time (Jenna) would go to class she would say to me 'Thank you so much,'" says Kuchar.

Bekka Goldberger, 16, couldn't agree more. She began taking vocal lessons in June 2006. Even though she had prior singing experience, she says Segara has been instrumental in teaching her technique.

"Over the past year and a half my voice has really grown and gotten better," says Goldberger. For instance, Segara instructs her to never sing the same lyrics the same way twice. Goldberger adds that she is also considering becoming a vocal instructor one day.

Segara says everybody can learn how to sing.

"With my background in counseling, singing and acting, between the three, there's no way someone is going to get out of here without expressing themselves," she says.