

When it doesn't go the way you want it to...

by Cathy C. Bonczek

Over the recent holiday, I offered to step out of from the safety of the singers' loft and lead my choir in a song. For the last month we have been in flux, with no director or cantor, and while waiting for an interim director to begin, a soloist was needed for one piece. I volunteered.

I used to relish these kinds of opportunities, but life (and surgery) has taken a toll on my voice, so it's not what it used to be. I decided to try anyway, because I think it's healthy to stretch yourself.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that I rehearsed a lot. It was a difficult piece and an unfamiliar one. Also, we had only two group rehearsals. Through these rehearsals, I also learned that the music's accompaniment would be difficult in terms of hearing my pitch.

The day of the performance, I arrived early to do one more rehearsal and felt I was ready to perform.

As I started to sing, the organ and choir joined in. I quickly realized we were in different places in the music. I stopped singing and waited for the next phrase, then found my place in the music. Not a great beginning, but it worked. I tried to quell the thoughts of self-doubt that started to creep into my mind.

A little further into the piece, I wavered on a note and felt I was off pitch. So, I just kept going and corrected it with the very next note. Now, I was feeling pretty upset. I'd made two mistakes before this large gathering.

I finished strongly and sat down very humbled. Then for the next 24 hours, I ruminated on the performance. Okay, maybe 48 hours. All of the elements had been in place for a great performance, and I wobbled. I found it hard to forgive myself for the poor showing.

In counterpoint, the feedback I received was:

"How brave you were! I couldn't have gotten up in front of that crowd."

"Your voice is beautiful!"

"Thank you for doing that song, it was the perfect sentiment."

Notably, not one person said, "You blew it!" or "You were subpar."

Except for me. I was using those words to berate myself, even as I knew it was my old Perfectionist Self rearing her head.

I share this to remind myself, and you, that the time spent on disappointment and regret was wasted time. I neglected to recognize what I did well: I challenged myself and I persevered. I provided a service and some music. The mistakes I made were not consequential, or even that remarkable.

There is really no great shame in doing a mediocre job. It's just that we have all gotten accustomed to expecting top-notch work and a nearly perfect performance at every juncture.

I've decided to learn from this, and I fully expect to volunteer again, and try again. I promise to be less judgmental of myself, because I displayed a lot of courage, even if it was a little offkey!

