

Amanda: Today we have Dr. Steven Newbie, an extremely a popular professor of music and director of Center for Worship and the Gospel Choir here at SPU. He is an accomplished composer, Gospel Jazz vocalist, and a worship leader whose works have been performed by orchestras across the country. They've earned him numerous rewards and grants. You may also recognize him as the voice of the Seattle Sounders FC, singing the national anthem for them well over a hundred times, or from recent performances with the Seattle symphony. I am so proud to call him a friend of mine, Dr. Newbie. Thank you for joining us today.

Dr. Newbie: Well, it's a pleasure to be here, Amanda, I appreciate it.

Amanda: We just, I love the sound of your voice. Can we just talk about that for a second? I'm sorry.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah, no it's good. You know, God gives everybody something and you know, I don't have much here anymore, so I guess I've got a little voice.

Amanda: You get your voice, you got your voice. So I'll just let that take us to our first question.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah.

Amanda: So you have this amazing voice. You're a singer, you're a musician, you're a composer. So what made you want to teach?

Dr. Newbie: Well, you know, I wanted to teach, I wasn't really looking to teach. I wasn't looking for it, but it found me and I knew I had a way with young people. I have a way with high schoolers and I have a way with college folks. I have a way with younger adults and I know a good teaching is, I'm from the city of Detroit and there were some good teachers there, but there were also these other teachers that weren't so good. And my reality, part of my story, I think I suffer from the consequences of having teachers where they weren't necessarily that good, but I couldn't blame them, in looking back, I mean they were really just trying to create a sustainability in a different kind of way back in the sixties in Detroit.

So when teaching found me, I just naturally moved into this mode of, you know, I really want people to understand well because I know what it feels like when you don't understand something and you're lingering there in the classroom, or you feel like, will I ever be able to catch up? And so I really am committed to helping people know what they need to know.

Amanda: So what makes a good teacher? How do you differentiate? Because my guess is you walk in the back of the classroom and within about 30 seconds you can probably spot who are the good teachers?

Dr. Newbie: Well I think you need to be a great planner and all ,but always plan that that plan is probably going to fail as well. And so if you're not flexible in being able to have a certain depth of security in a sense of your calling, really knowing that you're called to do that,

you don't have to worry about teaching well, you're going to teach well. Good teaching is when the lesson plans paper lift up off the page and they become alive amongst the community of learners. And good teachers have to consider themselves a full time learner as well.

Amanda: Hearing you talk about that, it really reminds me of you as a musician and you as a performer, and I know you do a lot of improvisation in Gospel and in Jazz. How do those two vocations, do they speak to each other? Did they learn from each other?

Dr. Newbie: We they absolutely inform, because you have to persuade, uh, I think being a good performer's, communicating and persuading an audience that this meaning, that I want you to take this meaning and hold it and sit with it. So you're very persuasive. And so good teaching is being able to persuade. You have to convince students, they need to know that they know without a shadow of a doubt that you are deeply concerned, in a loving way for their welfare. If students don't think you're really concerned about that, they're going to know the information, but they're not going to learn the material.

Amanda: Interesting. So it's the old, and I know this for my own life. You try the hardest for the professors or the teachers that you admire and respect and enjoy. Even if, subject aside, you try the most for the ones that you actually care what they think about you because you believe that they care about you.

Dr. Newbie: Absolutely. Teachers are human beings first, then human doings next. We do the teaching, but we have to be, we have to also be willing to be taught. We're constantly learning from our students and when something doesn't work out, that's great. We get to like, okay, that didn't work. Something else will, because there's so many styles of interpretation and how people learn, ways of learning and ways of engaging and I think good teaching is, you know, being able to have the skill and the discipline and the forethought and the desire that people will learn and that you can teach from many different strategies, the same concept.

Amanda: So you just keep trying, right? A different facet of ...

Dr. Newbie: Absolutely.

Amanda: A different way of looking at something until it resonates with each of your students.

Dr. Newbie: Right. Yeah. Good teachers don't get stuck.

Amanda: That's a good bumper sticker. Good teachers don't get stuck.

Dr. Newbie: No.

Amanda: I like that.

Dr. Newbie: They're willing to move.

Amanda: Yeah.

Dr. Newbie: They're willing to have shape and try a variety of things in order to be there for the student

Amanda: If every student who has ever sat in your classroom could walk out the door with one thing, what would it be?

Dr. Newbie: Wow. I didn't know that. I didn't think about it that way. I have a new lens from which to pierce at this concept.

Amanda: I like it and I like to feel that too. Don't we all? We all love that spark of, I have new things to think about and I can look at the world in a slightly new way.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah. And it's not this kind of wow, this entertainment, but the late Yolanda King, when I worked with her a while back, the daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King, she said it's really an edumataintment, is education and engagement. Yeah. You have to pull people in. They need to be drawn out of themselves and into a community of learners.

Amanda: And do you have that same perspective as a performer, that you're not just going to entertain and then tomorrow they'll go be entertained by something else? Do you feel the same way as a performer to the audience?

Dr. Newbie: Well, you know, I feel like I'm a communicator, people say I have a great voice and you, Oh, you know, you're a good musician and, but there's so many good musicians, so many talented people, but the talented folks that really communicate something, that touches me when I hear like a great pianist or great singer or, or great flutist or, or contra bass player, you know, and I'm listening to them play. I'm not thinking about their skillset. I'm thinking about, oh, what they just say it and how it was said and they're making me communicate, and their funding my imagination. And I tell my student who are performers and for me as a performer, I like to think about my super power being imagination. And so I think every good performer is a good communicator and is held up with this sense of imagination.

Amanda: Absolutely. I mean, you look at some of the most famous singers down through history. I mean, I'm going to show my age by these particular examples, but Joe Cocker or, or Willie Nelson, I mean, these people do not have the best voice. They barely have a voice, right?

Dr. Newbie: Yup.

Amanda: Bob Dylan, right?

Dr. Newbie: Bob Dylan, yeah I was about to say Bob Dylan. Yeah. I mean, his imagination. I mean, even a great singer like the late Al Jarreau or Donald Fagan from Steely Dan or Sarah Vaughan or Ella Fitzgerald. I mean, these people have gone on, and Aretha Franklin, I

mean, she had a powerful voice, but man, she could sing a story. Oh my goodness. It was amazing.

Amanda: Well, and that's why the nation right, stops in mourns when she passed because she was a communicator, right?

Dr. Newbie: She massive yeah, major.

Amanda: She entertained us and she educated us and she took us on a story, rest in peace Aretha.

Dr. Newbie: Yes yes.

Amanda: A lot of these projects that you've been involved in lately as a performer and as a composer, have to do with reconciliation. And we're talking about you balancing your life and your strength as a teacher, your life and your strength as a performer and a singer and a musician. But now we have this third element, and I don't want to say now like it's new to you, but I know you've been working on these reconciliation projects quite a bit. Can we talk about how you bring that in as well? That's a lot of things to balance?

Dr. Newbie: It's a lot. Well, you know, I think, you have to try to tell the truth. You have to tell the truth in your story. And my story is pretty complex. I remember I said to my mother, this was in the early sixties, I said, mom, I want to go play outside. Can I play? My mother said, no, honey, baby, you can't play there are tanks in the street. You know, that's in the city of Detroit. You know, when the riots were taking place.

And so I think there are these certain things that have happened in my life dealing with race and dealing with justice and injustice that have always drawn me to this idea of not only reconciliation but radical racial reconciliation in particular. Another moment that really moved me was this summer, last summer when I was in Jones County, Georgia, where I visited the grave site of a Daniel Newbie who was one in the 1800's who had enslaved my great, great, great grandfather Michael.

So I'm at this Newbie Mitchell cemetery and I drive up and I see this big Newbie name, you know, on, and I'm thinking like, oh my goodness on this tombstone, what's going on? And I walk up there, that's Daniel Newbie and I realize who this guy was because I've read about him. He was a farmer and, and I was standing in front of his grave and he's buried there with his wife. And then I just felt like this deep sense in the spirit of God was saying he reconciled. I was looking for this place, I was looking for something. And so after that, then I was walking around the grave and I saw all these unmarked graves. I can strongly assume that more than likely my great, great, great grandfather is buried there. And his name was Michael. And so I've been going on this journey of, of reconciliation.

So I talk about it. I write about it because I know for America this is a very important situation, this is a very important deal. We need to pay attention to it. So most of my

music, has been, you know, in this season, like the last 15 years really been this idea of reconciliation. I mean, my dissertation was a symphony to Dr. Martin Luther King and at won dissertation of the year, at the University of Michigan in 1995. And then I've written oratorical on Dr. Martin Luther King. My latest oratorical, this is going to be premiered in Toronto, Canada next month is the Nathaniel Deck Corral that or tutorials about Hosea and about the Prophet Hosea and Hosea and Gomer, and God working with Israel. And God saying in chapter 14 of Hosea, "Be reconciled, return to me." So the reconciliation theme and the radical reconciliation theme and all these themes of what does it mean to come together?

That's always been a big deal for me. And getting people to come together and sing gospel music in a way that, like, is it okay for me to sing a spiritual? Yes, I know you're not black, but yes, it's absolutely okay because this is like part of your story too. You know what I'm saying?

Amanda: Right. Right.

Dr. Newbie: And so I do think it brings healing. I do think it brings repair. I think it's restorative. And moreover, I really believe deep down inside that God is glorified when God's people of all ethnicities come together, when they come together and sing together, this good news because the Gospel is liberation. So where there's reconciliation, you have to realize that the repair and the damage is in one place and you have to make a decision to be reconciled. We were oppressed, we were all oppressed in some kind of way and God came to liberate and take us to another place. And that whole process is reconciliation.

Amanda: Can I just go back for a minute?

Dr. Newbie: Sure.

Amanda: Because I am just, I'm so struck by the mental picture of you standing before this huge gravestone of a man who owned your ancestors and God is saying to your spirit, be reconciled. What does that mean? I mean, the word forgiveness comes to mind, but I feel like it's a much bigger picture than that. What does that mean? In that moment?

Dr. Newbie: Well, It means that you have to go on this journey and take up this cross, take up this idea, every day because according to things outside of God's kingdom, you don't want to be reconciled, no, you want to beat people up. You want to ...

Amanda: Take what's yours?

Dr. Newbie: Take what's yours.

Amanda: Yeah.

Dr. Newbie: But in God's kingdom, it's another thing going on. And I think what you have to realize, that reconciliation is not a task. It is a journey and it's something that must be lived and breathed. Hmm.

Amanda: A choice, it's an every day choice.

Dr. Newbie: It's a choice every day. Every day.

Amanda: Like faith, right? You don't make one choice and that's it. It's like everyday.

Dr. Newbie: It's like love. It's like hope, and the greatest of these is love, but you can't get to love until you understand that there's a need to be reconciled.

Amanda: As you're a teacher, as you're a performer, as or your communicator as you're weaving in this reconciliation, what would be your dream? What would be your hope that when a hundred years from now? We're celebrating Dr. Steven Michael Newbie and remembering him. What would you hope that we say about you?

Dr. Newbie: Well, I hope that they say this man was really about radical reconciliation, radical racial reconciliation. And we see it in his art. We see it in his music, we see it in his life work and this is what he was about. And it has helped, it has helped humanity. I hope it does. And you know, whether I helped two or three people which is seen or unseen or a million people, you know, I remember singing, leading worship at Promise Keepers Stand In The Gap in the 90s where there were a million men on the march and I was asked to sing The Reconciliation Song by Morris Chapman and Buddy Owens and "Let us be the generation of reconciliation and peace." And that was another moment that I knew that this is something that God's calling me to be about. And so I've got these moments in my life where that has been an integral strategic theme that I believe the spirit of God placed before me, and there are still things today that I'm being challenged with and invited to participate that have a lot to do with this radical racial reconciliation.

Amanda: It almost seems counter to what we're talking about, to ask you a question that is going to focus back on you. Because I know I feel like your life is about saying no, don't look at me, it's about God, it's about the work.

Dr. Newbie: Well, I mean, I get it. You know, God uses people.

Amanda: Yeah.

Dr. Newbie: But God uses people that are willing to be available. And so it's not like I think I'm like all that, but I think I really have come out of my comfort zone. I'm willing to take risks for kingdom, for the kingdom, for God I did that when I left Detroit, Michigan. I left that, I was a teacher at the University of Michigan and then God called me to be a worship pastor. I was a worship pastor almost 25 years at this one church in the Seattle area, and it was a multiethnic church and that was a risk, but I was extremely blessed through the consequence of accepting God's invitation. And then that invitation, you know, during that invitation I was invited to be here. I would not have this conversation with you had I

not taken a risk back in 1993 to leave my comfort zone. God calls us to leave our comfort zones.

Amanda: And really where I was going with that, well I feel like, I don't think I've ever had a conversation with you that something hasn't come up and it's always a side note and it's never a brag and it's never a name drop, but you have met more amazing people and done ...

Dr. Newbie: Oh yeah it's crazy.

Amanda: And been in the position to do some unbelievable things.

Dr. Newbie: Oh, Leonard Bernstein, Stevie wonder. I mean, I've been on the platform with Michael W. Smith, Chris Tomlin, Newsboys and I say that, you know, I'm just not dropping names, but that's the way I was working, you know, that was what you did. I mean, I was a Maranatha promise band singer and I did that for about twelve years, and worked with Integrity Music. I took all those experiences and I brought them to the classroom and I can say that, I can look into a student's eyes and say, you know what? This is going to work. That's not going to work. This is what I've experienced. I bring my real life experiences in the industry and I bring it inside the classroom and I know the reason why I had those experiences is so I can pass on that knowledge and wisdom and since of discernment to the next generation.

Amanda: Yeah.

Dr. Newbie: 'Cause that's what it's about. Right?

Amanda: Right.

Dr. Newbie: Being in the moment and with all those people's great blue, what are you going to do with it? Well, I get to bring it to the classroom and I get to talk to students about it and I get to share it with them and I get to teach from that kind of life experience, it is very rich.

Amanda: And I know how much your students love it and appreciate it. 'Cause I see it everyday.

Dr. Newbie: Well I don't know, man, these students, I don't know. They don't tell me, they just, yes sir, Dr. Newbie, you know, that's all.

Amanda: It's true.

Dr. Newbie: But they know I love them.

Amanda: Yeah.

Dr. Newbie: I hope that.

Amanda: Yeah.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah. And they know I care. They know that I care.

Amanda: They do. They do. I can second that for sure. Backup one little bit. So you were talking about the risks, right? The risks and the rewards. And for you, I think some of the things you've said yes to, there was a much bigger risk on the other end than a lot of us have had to say yes to. Can you talk about a specific moment where you almost didn't say yes 'cause it seemed like too big a risk and then you had a really amazing experience on the other side.

Dr. Newbie: I almost didn't leave Detroit to come to Seattle. I almost didn't leave, listen, I had a job at the University of Michigan. They were training me to be a concert music composer to get big commissions and all that. I was the first African American male in the compositional program to teach.

Amanda: Wow.

Dr. Newbie: Oh the first black faculty person in the composition division at the history of that university.

Amanda: Wow.

Dr. Newbie: You have to understand that. And today they ...

Amanda: So even staying was a risk, right?

Dr. Newbie: We'll stay was a risk, but leaving was even riskier. I'm going to do that to take on a church job? Really God, really? I know some people thought I was absolutely crazy, but we did it. And I was very blessed. I wouldn't be back into the education space and environment had I not left the University of Michigan to get all of that experience working on the west coast and in the northwest and learning what it is to be a worship leader and a recording artist with Maranatha and a recording artist with Integrity Music and I had my few little projects, that's more than what some people would even ever, people don't get to do that.

Amanda: Right.

Dr. Newbie: And I got a chance to do that. Why? And it was the spirits saying, because I want you to disciple others.

Amanda: I hope we all make those choices. Right?

Dr. Newbie: Yeah.

Amanda: I hope you all make that choice.



Dr. Newbie: We have to take risks and there are still risks in front of us that we have to make a choice every day.

Amanda: Do you have a recent one?

Dr. Newbie: This Hosea oratorical in Toronto, I almost pulled the plug on it. I almost said, you know, I don't know if we're ready for it. And the conductor convinced me, basically there's no time like the present, we have to do it because I was fearful of failing, of not having like the scores where they need to be in one of my challenges. Sometimes I'm afraid to fail and I won't take certain risks, because I'm just thinking you know what, I just need to be in my comfort zone. But a Leonard Blightentailor, the conductor [inaudible 00:21:21] said, "No doctor Newbie, we really need to do this and I think it's going to be okay." So I just got back from these like amazing rehearsals in Toronto, these amazing singers. And I'm so glad I took the risk and I did not delay and pull the piece.

People don't understand, composing is a very demanding, it's a very selfish animal. It wants to consume you and you need to be consumed with it in order to really hear the music deeply that's going on, that's being deposited in you because you have to be a ready writer and transcribe what you hear. And that's the discipline. And some artists, they're just not ready to do that. There's some times I have procrastinated and not pushed on some pieces because of, and I'm hearing all this stuff and I can't hurry up and get it down. I got to take the risk and be vulnerable and do the art. Being an artist is risky.

Amanda: Amen to that. Right. But there's so much reward, right? There's ...

Dr. Newbie: Oh my goodness. Yeah.

Amanda: There's actually, another episode of our podcast we were dealing speaking with are a writer who helps others become writers and tell their own story, and there's a bigger risk in letting it die inside you. Than the risk of letting it out.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah I get that, I get it.

Amanda: And the more you try, I think the more you realize I can't let it stay inside.

Dr. Newbie: No.

Amanda: And now, like you said, and now you get to help others, you can get to pull that out of others as well.

Dr. Newbie: Yes.

Amanda: Do you think every college student should have to take a music class?

Dr. Newbie: Absolutely. Especially in liberal arts.

Amanda: Wait, what do you really think?

Dr. Newbie: Yeah. Duh. You need to. Well, it's like this. If you're not going to take a course in music then just throw away all of the music that you, 'cause you're listening to it, but you haven't learned how to really listen and how to really listen to it well. Oh, if you can just take one music course, your imagination, your super power of imagination will just explode.

Amanda: I have a feeling that after this airs all your classes are going to be booked up. Sign up now students.

Dr. Newbie: That's right, let's book up these classes.

Amanda: Sign up now and there's not gonna be any left. Alright, we have time for one more question.

Dr. Newbie: Okay.

Amanda: And it's really just what I want to know. What's your dream project have had so many varied and unbelievably amazing and out of the box projects, if you could wave a magic wand and have the project of your dreams, what would it be?

Dr. Newbie: This is like a really big dream. I really love what Theologians call the Fifth Gospel. Now this dream is a little complex, but just bare with me.

Amanda: We're bearing with you.

Dr. Newbie: Okay. I want to write an opera on Hosea that has a sci-fi slant to it. And with that, that would be housed in this institution, the worship and the arts in some place where there's like a thousand acres were artists all over the world descend at this place and practice their worship arts and it would be well funded. I know this might sound crazy, but like a 200 ... I don't want to talk money yet, but it's going to cost a lot to do. Yeah. But humanity is going to pay a price if it isn't done. I still have not seen a very serious conservatory of the arts that's focused and dedicated to the Christian sacred text and to art that reflects Christianity's thoughts and understanding in theologies so that so that humanity flourishes.

Amanda: Well and reconciliation, right?

Dr. Newbie: Yeah.

Amanda: Bringing them all the cultural experiences, as the same thing together.

Dr. Newbie: All the cultural experiences, absolutely. And because I just have this sense, I just have this feeling that when we proclaim God's kingdom through the arts, theater, dance, spoken word, music, film, poetry, and so on and in literature, I just think it hits the soul in a different kind of way. Even preaching is an art form. Good preachers consider

themselves artists, poets, and priests. Our artists, if our politicians would only see themselves as artists as well, may be more good work can get done. I mean, some folks are doing good work and some they need help, they need our prayers.

Can there be a community of learners at a space where this thing is going on 24/7 and people from all over the world would descend upon this place and there would be this of course, these festivals, these performances is constantly on God's kingdom, on reconciliation. Now that's a big dream, but it would bring healing to the nations. It would revolutionize the way we see each other. I'm convinced of it.

Amanda: Well, if someone within the sound of my voice has multiple millions to get the ball rolling, you know where to find us.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah. We're here.

Amanda: We're here.

Dr. Newbie: We're here. Let's do this.

Amanda: I can't thank you enough for being here today.

Dr. Newbie: Oh Amanda, thank you. Thank you for the invitation. It's an honor to serve, just call and you know I'm going to do my best to be here.

Amanda: Can I ask one more tiny favor before you go?

Dr. Newbie: Yeah.

Amanda: Will you sing us out a couple bars of something?

Dr. Newbie: Sure. When peace like a river. Attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, thou has taught me top say, it is well, it is well with my soul. It is well with your soul, amen.

Amanda: Oh, it's well with mine, thank you Steven.

Dr. Newbie: Yeah, yeah, thank you, thank you, Amanda.