



All Ears English Episode 176:

A Professional Singer Shows You How to Deeply Learn the Sounds of a Language

Lindsay: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 176: “A Professional Singer Shows You How to Deeply Learn the Sounds of a Language.”

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel’, from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Professional recording artist Lydia Lyon doesn’t speak Arabic, but she can sing it perfectly. Learn how, as she shares her advice for learning a language from the viewpoint of a singer.

Today’s episode, we experienced some technical difficulties with the audio. So, please bear with us and be patient if you hear a lower audio quality than normal.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Gabby, can you believe that All Ears English has been around for a year?



Gabby: It has been almost a whole year. Oh my gosh! It's amazing.

Lindsay: And it's awesome. Our community is growing. We wanna (want to) thank you guys.

Gabby: Yeah, we love putting on the All Ears English show. But you know what, it's in danger.

Lindsay: Why?

Gabby: It's in danger because we need your help to keep going. We need your support. We've started a Kickstarter campaign that will help to fund the All Ears English podcast. All the episodes are going to continue to be free for you, but we need your help to fund our Kickstarter campaign to keep going. The deadline is October 1, 2014, and you can go find our campaign on our website, AllEarsEnglish.com/Kickstarter.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay.

Lindsay: Hey, Gabby.

Gabby: How you doing?

Lindsay: Excellent.

Gabby: Great, great. I am so excited because we have a wonderful guest today joining us. Her name is Lydia Lyon, and she is a professional singer and violinist. Lydia, how are you doing?

Lydia: I'm just fine. How are you?

Gabby: We're doing great. Yeah, we are really excited to have you here today. (Um), I have listened to your work in English and in Arabic, and as I've told you I was really impressed with your singing in Arabic. You sound so great, like your accent and the feeling behind the words is so great. And I just thought maybe we could talk about how you reached that point with Arabic, and singing in Arabic. (Um), are you, are you fluent in Arabic?



Lydia: I'm actually not, thank you so much. Yeah, I'm not fluent at all. I can just speak basic phrases, and, (kind of), (you know), express emotion pretty well in the language, but I'm definitely not fluent.

Gabby: Well I think it's really interesting to know that because you're able to express yourself so beautifully in Arabic through song. But yet, you're not, (you know), conversationally, or, or traditionally fluent. (Um), so, I thought it would be really interesting to share some of your methods, or to ask you to explain how you are able to produce (um), these, these songs in Arabic. How did you work on, (um), the accents? How did you learn the feeling or the meaning behind the words? (Um), maybe you could share some of your tips and your story – how you, how you came to this point with singing in Arabic.

Lydia: Sure. (Um)...

Gabby: Great.

Lydia: So, I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, (um), and when I was in high school, (um), I'd had friends, actually, that lived, (um), at the local university at St. Louis University...

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Lydia: ...and all of my friends were from Saudi. (Um), so I basically would, (you know), listen to them talk all the time, and they would try to teach me, (you know), a lot of things in Arabic. And of course they shared a lot of music with me, and I basically just fell in love with it and I just, I decided that I really wanted to learn how to sing in it.

Lindsay: (Mm).

Gabby: That's wonderful. So you, you, you just wanted to connect with your friends, and through that you, you have this love of the music and culture.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Lydia: Yes.



Lindsay: I like that. So it started with a passion and interest in something, and then you were able to have that motivation to kind of move into that task.

Lydia: Right.

Gabby: That's great. So, through your friends, they, they exposed you to the music, to the culture, and what about with phrases, did they teach you a little bit of Arabic, too?

Lydia: Yes, they did teach me a little bit of Arabic. (Um), and actually it was, (mm), my closest friend, his name's Jamad, who actually taught me to listen to, not only, (you know), the popular music but also he taught me to listen to like the old classical music of like Umm Kulthum and...

Lindsay: Oh.

Lydia: ...(um), [indiscernible 05:10] and everything, so I...

Gabby: Oh, excellent.

Lydia: Yeah.

Gabby: That's a great tip because we've talked on the podcast before about learning English through music, and I think it's a good idea to not only listen to modern music, but also some of that traditional music, and...

Lindsay: Definitely...

Gabby: ...its different.

Lindsay: Definitely.

Lydia: Yeah.

Gabby: It's really different. And you can learn about the culture through different kinds of music as well. So that's great. Okay, so your, your friends were really a big motivator and a big inspiration for learning and, and using Arabic in your professional life. (Um)...

Lydia: Right.



Gabby: How did you then, (like) how did you really work on your accents and get these songs down, that, that you perform now?

Lydia: It's basically, for me [indiscernible 05:58] imitation.

Gabby: That's great. So imitation, watching the songs, listening to them, and just, just repeating what you heard? Okay. That's, I think that's great for learning any language really, is having something you're listening to and that you can just, you can repeat it, and it's, it's how we really learn, (you know), our whole lives, is we...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...we see other people, (you know), talking, or...

Lindsay: Right. That's how kids learn too.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: They just imitate what's around them and it's such a simple way to do it, but it makes so much sense.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lydia: Right.

Gabby: Ah, that's great. Well, do you have any other tips, (you know), from your perspective as a singer and a performer, anything else that we could share with our audience of, of English speakers and English learners?

Lydia: (You know), of course I think probably the most important for me, (uh), thus far, has been to really try to, (um), when learning a new language, (um), immerse yourself in the culture. Because it's through culture that you really learn how to speak, (um), even if you're not perfect yet and even if you're still working, you can really speak with such authority through just learning how people communicate. Because there are so many different ways that so many different people communicate, and I think that's the best thing that has helped me in my journey through learning Arabic music. (Um), also, listening to, (you know), (you know), TV



shows or (um), (you know), anything like – music helps. (You know), just conversations between people – if you're listening to some kind of show or the movie, it really helps to, (um), improve your pronunciation, (um), as well as a lot of people translate songs, which is great. That's how I learn most languages, and I take songs and I'll translate them. And then I'll start to recognize little phrases that are commonly used in the language.

Gabby: Oh!

Lindsay: (Mm). Okay. So, you're learning in chunks, you're learning those phrases?

Lydia: Yes, of course, and then (you know), then that's when conversation starts to build. So once you've learned, (you know), simple verbs, and, (you know), nouns, and everything like that you can – and you know how to make a simple structure of a sentence you can start to listen to songs, translate them, and, and then really figure out what your friend has been saying to you all these times. You hear those sounds.

Lindsay: Oh.

Lydia: ...and then it just kind of clicks, (you know).

Lindsay: What a cool feeling. The light bulb goes on...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ..., it's now "Oh, that's what they were saying the whole time.

Gabby: That's so great. Oh, that's, that's great. (You know), it's interesting because I think we've said a few times before: Don't Translate.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: (You know)...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...just learn English for English and don't try to translate to your native language first. But I think what you're saying is really helpful, Lydia,



because, (you know), you can look at a, a song, and if you don't know the vocabulary, then you, you need to translate.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Lydia: Yeah.

Gabby: But once you understand the meaning, you can attach the meaning to the phrase.

Lydia: Right.

Gabby: You don't always translate, forever and ever. It's just the first time.

Lindsay: Yeah...

Lydia: Right.

Lindsay: ...one thing that strikes me about the way of learning is that this is a really deep level of learning because it sounds like a lot of the songs might be quite emotional, or very deep in feeling. And we've talked with other English teachers about the importance of activating the emotions when we learn, and I can imagine that that's one reason why you've been able to pick it up so quickly, because you feel it so deeply when you're singing.

Lydia: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: (Um).

Gabby: That's a really good point.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Lydia: Thank you.

Gabby: And also repetition, because you must practice the songs more than once – many more times than once, I'm sure.

Lydia: Yeah, (uh-hm), yeah. Repetition is key I-I'd say. (Um), and (I mean), I usually will take – they're always, (like), in the songs, there's always some



section of the song that, (um), is very challenging, that I can't commit to memory. So...

Lindsay: Oh. (Hm).

Lydia: ...I repeat that section over and over and over, let it go, come back, repeat it over and over and over until I commit it to memory. And that's what helps with associating it with, (you know) – the words in songs usually are things that we say every day.

Gabby: Right.

Lydia: So that's how I connect it and it'll always stick with me eventually.

Lindsay: (Um).

Gabby: Has there, has there ever been part of a song that you really get stuck on?

Lydia: Yes, actually. Now currently, (um), I'm actually due to record, (um), a new cover of a song, (um), by a singer named **[indiscernible 10:34]** and she has – (um), one of her songs that I'm gonna (going to) sing has a very quick phrase that, (you know), has a lot of, (um), syllables that I just can't really...

Lindsay: (Um)...

Lydia: ... commit to memory.

Gabby: Oh.

Lydia: And I really need to before my recording session, and it's giving me a lot of trouble.

Gabby: Oh boy.

Lydia: But, the other day I got it. So, [crosstalk].

Gabby: Wonderful.

Lindsay: Congratulations.



Gabby: Yeah, that's great. So it sounds like through repetition and just staying motivated and, and also you have a deadline, (right), because you, you're recording on a specific day I'm sure. So you (kind of)...

Lydia: Yes.

Gabby: ...you have that urgency. So I guess we can learn that...

Lindsay: Yeah, we can learn.

Gabby: ...too. (Mm-hm).

Lindsay: There's a lot we can learn from this.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: That's great. Well, Lydia I was wondering if you wouldn't mind, if you would maybe sing a, a phrase for us in Arabic, maybe, (um), a few phrases or as much as you would like, just, (um), to quickly, (you know), share your voice with our listeners.

Lydia: Sure, (uh), I wouldn't mind. (Um)...

Gabby: Great.

Lydia: ...I-I'll sing something. My favorite, (um), probably my – one of my favorite singers, her name is **[indiscernible 22:45]**. I'll sing a song called **[indiscernible 11:48]**; I'll just sing the first few lines.

Lindsay: Great.

Gabby: Okay.

Lydia: Okay.

{Lydia singing Arabic song}

Gabby: Ooh.

Lindsay: Wow. That's beautiful. I loved it.



Gabby: That is so beautiful.

Lindsay: That was...

Lydia: Thank you.

Gabby: I love that song, when you sing it.

Lindsay: That was a treat.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Gorgeous.

Gabby: That's wonderful.

Lindsay: Wow.

Gabby: Wow, yeah. We're in awe over you.

Lindsay: So cool.

Gabby: That's so cool. Yeah.

Lydia: Thank you.

Gabby: Well, I know that some of our listeners will want to know how to find out more about your work, and, and your album, which is actually mostly in English, but I know you have a couple of songs in Arabic. (Um), would you tell our listeners where they could find your, your album that you just released?

Lydia: Sure, (um), you can find it easiest on my website, which is LydiaLyon.com, and that's l-y-d-i-a-l-y-o-n.com.

Gabby: Great.

Lindsay: (Um), and you can also find it on iTunes, (um), under 'Lydia Lyon'.

Gabby: Awesome.

Lindsay: Very nice.



Gabby: That's great.

Lydia: Yeah.

Gabby: Yeah. Well, I really appreciate that you joined us for an episode here, and (you know), giving some of your advice on how to develop your language skills from, from the point of view of an artist...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...a singer, a musician.

Lindsay: I think our listeners are really gonna (going to) find this inspiring.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lydia: Oh, well thank you. I hope I did a good job for you.

Gabby: Absolutely.

Lindsay: Sure.

Gabby: Yeah, and we wish you lots of success with your album that just came out, and also with future recordings.

Lydia: Thank You.

Lindsay: Thank you so much.

Lydia: I really appreciate you guys having me on.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Great.

Lindsay: Thanks for coming.

Gabby: Yeah, thanks Lydia.

Lindsay: All right.

Lydia: Of course.



[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

