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“Rehearsal and Performance: Knowing the Difference Makes the Difference”

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Purpose: to study the structure and practice of rehearsal and performance as it relates to middle and high school bands and orchestras in terms of how to provide better musical experiences for students and improve ensemble performance.

Basic ideas or beliefs of this study:

How music is made.

At the most fundamental level, music is made in the way one note moves to the next. Every note in a quality composition has its implied function and implied movement that musicians hear as note-tendency. Because musicians hear note-tendency, they can actualize in sound the movement of notes as the composer intended. When every note is allowed to fulfill its desired function, then every motive, every phrase, every section, every movement, and the whole of the composition comes into being. Hearing what is actually in the music and responding with sound to what is heard is how music is made.

We teach and perform music for the valuable and unique experience quality music affords the listener.

To receive that experience, one must go below the surface of the music which cannot be done without the act of interpreting music.

Quality literature.

The first priority for student ensembles is the selection of quality literature. All ensemble training and development must be consistent in terms of what is required to perform music of the highest quality. There is no reason to teach the highest level of performance skills other than to be used in the performance of the music that requires that level of skill.

Students enjoy both performing and rehearsing.

Students are more likely to enjoy rehearsals when they are structured on musical learning and experience rather than on technical development. In fact, the technical approach to rehearsal is, in fact, not rehearsal at all, but rather, practice.

Musical approach to rehearsal and performance is based on constant listening and adjusting.

Because music is sound of a certain kind that is in constant movement through time, listening skills must be developed, not only to hear the movement in time, but to control that movement - hearing how the notes want to move, which requires constant adjusting or manipulating.

Hearing musical sound as it moves is a higher listening skill than that of listening to technique.

Once students are taught to listen to sound as it moves, and how it wants to move, hearing technical problems are so obvious and recognizable that it takes no effort on the part of the player. Because their listening is constant, problems such as intonation, precision, balance, etc. never materialize because they hear and correct the potential problem before it materializes. Also, it must be mentioned that if an intonation problem is heard during rehearsal or performance, it is not poor intonation that is the problem, rather, it is a symptom of a problem, i.e. not listening correctly or not adjusting quickly enough.

The pursuit of musical development improves technique better than drilling the technique.

Drilling technique in rehearsal is not fun, educational or productive. It is an anti-musical exercise that tends to desensitize the very musical instincts we are trying to develop in our students.

The ensemble is the conductor's musical instrument.

This instrument is to the conductor what the piano is to the pianist. The difference in the two instruments is that one is comprised of humans. Therefore the ensemble must be trained and taught to respond to the conductor as a co-interpreter.

No conductor can cause a player to play even one note the way they would play it.

The closest a conductor can get to that desired goal is to teach the student to hear what the conductor hears.

Music is an instantaneous phenomenon.

The following is a quote from an article “Unforgettable Lessons from Leopold Stokowski” by Legh Burns printed in a January 1977 issue of *The Instrumentalist* and reprinted in the November 2011 issue:

Each note, alone or in combination, is special, and will sound different each time it is performed. There can be no exact duplication of any performance, no dwelling on a particular sound the same way each time. This is true whether you are on the second or seventeenth repetition. Each time is unique.

Rehearsal

Purpose: To prepare for performance.

Function: A rehearsal functions as an educational process whereby students acquire the knowledge, skills and training necessary for them to achieve their highest possible musical experience during performance. The emphasis in rehearsal is on teaching students to think and act as musicians.

Three distinct areas of rehearsal

1. Ensemble training.

Sound quality.

Quality of sound is the most important performance skill. Because our sound - individual or ensemble - is what the listener hears. And, because we make music, not with instruments, but with the sounds we make on those instruments. Only quality sound can be controlled and adjusted, an absolute necessity for successful musical performance.

Unified playing style.

What causes an ensemble to sound as an ensemble is unity of playing style. If all members of a 60-piece ensemble play with a unified style, they will sound as one instrument rather than a collection of 60 performers.

Playing expressively.

One of the greatest fallacies of our time is the belief that playing expressively, i.e. responding faithfully to all the expressive information on the printed page, is the same as interpreting music - and most certainly it is not.

Ensembles must be taught to play expressively, which has to do with beauty, shape, nuance, style, mood, etc.; respond to expressive marking in the score: accents, crescendos, retards, etc.; respond to musical genres and styles such as a march, overture, song, dance, etc.; respond to emotional character such as happy, sad, noble, intimate, heroic, aggressive, etc.; and taught to demonstrate implied effects in compositions, such as drive, anticipation, pause, sigh, etc.

Managing the flow of intensity.

This is an area of neglect in many ensembles. Some do not differentiate between dynamics and intensity. Dynamics has to do with volume of sound while intensity functions as the life-blood of serious music. Managing the flow of intensity is not unlike manipulating the accelerator of an automobile.

Intuitive performance skills.

Any activity executed "in real time" must be learned and demonstrated intuitively. Learning to respond intuitively is not centered on intellectual knowing, but rather on the experience of interacting with the object to be learned - for example learning to ride a bicycle or play a musical instrument. Intuitive performance skills are developed through the act-respond-act-respond phenomenon. Because music is constantly moving in time, adjustment is required of the players every second and to every aspect of ensemble playing. If done correctly playing music - alone or with others - is not unlike walking the high-wire. Total engagement, constant adjustment or disaster.

Probing skills.

Probing is manipulating music, in time, to discover every aspect of a composition in terms of substance, expressiveness and meaning. Mahler said, "What is best in music is not to be found in the notes." In addition, Hemingway said that great literature is like as iceberg - 20% above the surface and 80% below the surface. To effectively perform music, the musicians must know what is beneath the surface. This process of discovery can never be fully realized without utilizing the techniques of probing.

Another function of probing in rehearsal is to determine the limit of things such as tempo, dynamics, expression, style, etc. For example, as to how much crescendo should be produced at a particular point in a composition, only probing can answer that question. By having the ensemble produce too much and then too little crescendo, repeating this and varying the process by degree, they will eventually discover the correct amount because the correct amount of crescendo will sound natural and convincing to the players. With each playing the crescendo will be slightly different, but the players will automatically make the adjustment because they have learned how it sounds when it is correct.

Also, knowing that the excitement of music is best realized when performing near the edge of the composition, as far to the edge as one can go without going past it, only probing allows the performer that possibility. Without probing how would a performer ever know where the edge is?

Interpreting music.

For the conductor, the ensemble members, and the audience to receive the fullness of what quality music has to offer, music must be interpreted, i.e. recreated. The conductor cannot interpret the music without the participation of players that have been taught the skill of interpreting music.

When students have been taught the skills and techniques listed above, they will have acquired some ability to interpret music. In the beginning what they learn about interpreting music is at the skill level. Hopefully as they grow and mature it will rise to the level of art. This process should begin as early as possible. The process equips them to hear what is in the music, respond to it intuitively and produce the music the composer intended.

If taught correctly, students will hear what is in the composition to be reproduced the same as the conductor does, with slight, marginal differences that are easily negotiated and/or compromised. Because no one can cause another to play even one note exactly as they would play it all performance involving more than one musician has to be about compromise. If the players in the ensemble haven't been taught to interpret music, they don't possess the skills needed to compromise. Can you imagine ballroom dancing with a partner that does not know how to dance, that does not move intuitively, or that cannot interpret the communication of the lead dancer or worse yet, not willing to compromise?

Interpreting music is highly dependent on two major skills: listening to music as it moves through time, to hear how the music wants to move (note-tendency); and the skill of interacting at an intuitive level. Conductors and players interact during the actual conducting process. At the same time players and the conductor are interacting and adjusting to each other, they are also adjusting with the other players in the ensemble; players are also interacting with their instruments, adjusting to the acoustics where they are playing, and to the music. These interactions and adjustments must be done at the intuitive level because they have to happen so quickly and without thinking.

For students to become independent and for our ensembles to mature musically we must teach them to interpret music We teach them how to do it and then allow them to do it. After all, they are the ones making the sounds The great orchestra conductor Herbert von Karajan taught his players to hear music the way he heard it and then trusted them to perform their role in the music making process. He said, "I give my players all the freedom they need to do what I want them to do."

2. Learning compositions.

Students learn compositions in three ways: physically, getting the notes under their fingers; mentally, understanding the form, style, tempo, texture, instrumentation,

compositional techniques; and aurally, knowing how the piece sounds from beginning to end.

Students need time to truly internalize a composition. For students to receive the greatest musical experience the music must "sing" inside them.

It is during this part of rehearsal that students begin the process of unlocking the music from the printed page.

3. Final preparation for performance or refining ensemble performance skills to an artistic level.

At this point we assume the ensemble is trained and the composition has been learned. Now begins the process of creating the potential for the actual performing experience. It is here that the teacher becomes a conductor, a performing musician on equal footing with the ensemble. The conductor and the students share equally the responsibility for all aspects of the final preparation.

The ultimate challenge in the preparation phase is to bring the ensemble to its highest performing level without letting the rehearsal slip into a performance. One way to prevent the rehearsal from veering into a performance is to insist that the students lower their maximum level of intensity and degree of musical expression while refining the technical aspects.

Performance

Since the purpose of rehearsal is to prepare for performance and because rehearsal is most productive when structured as anticipation of performance, a performance must be treated as something truly special.

Student should approach a performance in a state of anticipation and high expectation because it is an event for which they have been working and waiting. The journey is neither safe nor comfortable, rather it is filled with risk and great responsibility. They must bring life to the composition from the sound of the first note, and sustain and maintain that life throughout the journey.

When musicians perform with spontaneity, conviction and courage, when they challenge themselves to the limit pursuing the experience that exists in great music, they can then experience the magic of music which includes those illusive "peak" moments.

Performance of important music is one of the most glorious and valuable experiences known to humans.

Through the experience and leadership of good conductors, students can have musical experiences beyond their imagination; life changing experiences that will resonate in them for a lifetime. The ultimate experience is in the performance, not the rehearsal.

Closing thoughts about performance

Here, almost everything changes. We have studied, prepared, experimented, probed; we have learned the composition, have the technique well in hand. We understand what the music is about, what the music has to say to the audience. We understand what we have to do to deliver that message. The focus of attention has moved from the technical, from the mental, to the instinctive where the conductor and the players become one with the music. The determination, the confidence and the emotion is elevated to the highest possible level. But no one will lose control. The concert begins now. No more planning, no more trying and failing, no more fear, this is it. The drama begins. The players are challenging the composition to give up its substance and meaning. As they move through the concert, things get yet more dramatic - no letting up. We are in this to the end. Each new piece has to be conquered.

The movement of the music is in constant change. Time after time we move dangerously close to the edge, but yet survive. Nothing is held back, nothing saved. The mental energy, the concentration, the emotion is paying a tremendous price, but will hold to the end. This is what we planned for, this is what we worked for, we did it. And that is what it is all about!

Advantages of teaching the musical approach to rehearsal and performance.

1. It provides better learning and musical experiences for the students
2. It keeps the students constantly engaged in the music making process which increases their concentration and lessens discipline problems and off-task behavior.
3. It holds students responsible for what they have been taught, thus promoting musical maturity and independence among students.
4. It makes every rehearsal an enjoyable experience for the students. With this approach rehearsal is never dull, boring or redundant.
5. This approach helps directors identify and resolve ensemble problems, and control the quality of rehearsal from day to day.
6. This approach offers the conductors the best possible assurance of having concerts that are unique to the rehearsal experience, the reward they have been working for and the high point of their musical experience.
7. This approach allows the director to actually conduct the ensemble, rather than go through the motions of beating time, changing tempos, giving cues, indicating something about dynamic levels and accents, and managing fermatas?