

Artistry

“Creativity is not only a natural process; it’s the natural process. Once we are willing to tap our creative potential, we will move to doing what nature does, creating the impossible; not just doing things differently, but doing different things.” George Land & Beth Jarman

Meeting Room W187

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

TED: Ideas Worth Spreading

www.ted.com is a hub for the dissemination of inspiring, creative, and provocative content generated by some of the most agile minds across a broad spectrum of disciplines. The following are some of the most apropos to the

development and exercise of artistry.



Ken Robinson lays out the link between three troubling trends: rising drop-out rates, schools' dwindling stake in the arts, and ADHD. An important, timely talk for parents and teachers.

Evelyn Glennie illustrates how listening to music involves much



more than simply letting sound waves hit your eardrums.

Stuart Brown shows how plenty of play in childhood makes for happy, smart adults - and keeping it up can make us smarter at any age.

Patsy Rodenburg tells the story of a profound encounter that reveals the deeper role the arts can play in people's lives.

Bobby McFerrin uses the pentatonic scale to reveal one surprising result of the way our brains are wired.



It's closer than you think...

Unlimited Possibility

Artistry is an ideal that is often misunderstood, but it occupies the very heart of why education in the arts is essential. Artistry isn't merely skill, nor is it simply creativity. It is the deliberate exercise of all one's faculties (intellect, emotion, technique, intuition) in a concerted effort to bring into being something that wasn't there before. For a musician, it is an honest, unpretentious effort to make music in a given moment. For young musicians, that moment might be a single note, by accident. For pros it is likely to stretch over a sustained period of time, on purpose. Of greatest importance is the realization that artistry is possible at every level – from beginner to expert.



“Creative work is play. It is free speculation using materials of one's chosen form...The flashpoint of creation in the present moment is where work and play merge.”

Stephen Nachmanovitch

Aesthetics & Listening

To be in the present moment is, in our society, a skill we are rapidly losing. It requires all our senses to be fully engaged and focused on what is happening around us right now, rather than on the other end of a text, tweet, or video stream. To be present is to be experiencing the world aesthetically. All the arts are aesthetic, but music has a critical edge in academia.

Listening is the key to music's role at the center of effective education.

To listen is to be in a state of changeability, and one of the simplest synonyms for education is change. A person who has been educated has been changed at a fundamental level. Musicians learn to listen efficiently and deliberately from a young age, and to use what they hear creatively. Furthermore, artistry relies on divergent thinking to create something new, unusual, and valuable. Artistry in an ensemble setting also relies on convergent thinking, or the ability to merge with others into a single cohesive unit. The ability to do both at once – to be simultaneously divergent and convergent – is the focus of this clinic.

Core Concepts

We will identify the core concepts that support artistic thinking from day one, as well as practical techniques to inspire, identify, share, practice, and build upon artistry within an ensemble at any stage of development. You'll learn how to exercise the three fundamental elements of group music making: listening, imitation, and improvisation. In the end, you'll be well on your way to realizing the goal of artistic engagement with any ensemble.

Ensemble Games

The purpose of an ensemble game is to enhance ensembleship, or the ability of musicians to function effectively in groups. Although they may be used early in a rehearsal, they are not intended to be warm ups (i.e. although the activity may literally warm up the muscle tissue and breathing mechanism, that's not the point or focus of the activity). Ensemble games are portable, and any given game could be used to assist the ensemble with various pieces of music. They are not repertoire specific, and are achievable without reference to specific sheet music or notation. Ensemble games are directly related to the broader qualities of musicianship, rather than to narrower tasks such as decoding notation, or learning to count. Ensemble games involve the entire ensemble, therefore the specific activity must be easily translatable to all methods of sound production (winds, percussion, strings). As games, they rely on the spirit of play, experimentation, and improvisation rather than on a dictatorial, pedagogical "top down" approach. Ideally, the conductor should be able to play too, and on an equal footing with members of the ensemble. Although score keeping may not be appropriate, a friendly sense of competition is. To that end, clearly enumerated goals/targets are essential. The players must have the ability to adjudicate and communicate degrees of success. Finally, the most effective ensemble games are progressive (e.g. they begin with a single person or pair, and grow to include all; or begin with a single task and grow by adding tasks).



ABCDE

Two volunteers of the same gender are chosen. One acts as the model, the other the imitator. The model says the first five letters of the alphabet, in his or her normal speaking voice. The imitator is charged with creating, with his or her own voice, as perfect an imitation of the model as possible. The ensemble is charged with coaching the imitator, as well as assessing success. The various phases set up increasingly disparate pairs: matched gender, opposite gender, matched instruments (e.g. both clarinets), two different instruments from same family (e.g. clarinet & saxophone), instruments from different families. The game itself is then applicable in a full ensemble situation by transferring the listening and matching process first to adjacent players, then to sections, and eventually to the entire ensemble. The result is a fully blended sound, which can then be reversed following the same process into juxtaposition or opposition rather than blend.

Find the Rhythm

A section is chosen and confers among themselves to compose a rhythmic pattern lasting four beats. The rhythm is known only to the section that composed it. The remainder of the ensemble simply plays a scale in whole notes. The chosen section plays the scale as well, but using their rhythm in lieu of whole notes. As members of the ensemble hear the rhythm, their task is to join it until everyone in the ensemble is playing the rhythm. The object of the game is for the ensemble to lock on to the mystery rhythm as quickly as possible. The chosen section's job is to project the rhythm clearly in order to provide a viable target for the ensemble to hit. Begin with larger and more prominent sections as the target (percussion, trumpets, etc.) and gradually reduce the relative weight of the target (e.g. from percussion, to saxophones, to flutes). As the ensemble's speed increases, reduce the target from a group to an individual player, or from higher to lower in range.

Snow Plow/Laser/Stalker

In this game, the ensemble experiments with several stock characters to develop their ability to relate sounds to one another in diverse ways. The snow plow effect uses a dense, broad group or sectional sound to push through the remainder of the ensemble. The laser relies on a highly focused and energetic sound to penetrate the sound mass of the rest of the ensemble. The stalker sound is an accompanying sound that tracks a foreground sound at varying distances, increasing or decreasing the prominence of the foreground sound according to the stalker's relative dynamic presence. Finally, the weave calls for two or more sounds to dovetail or intertwine to create a balanced, blended composite. The game is similar to Rock/Paper/Scissors in that various sections select a character to present, and the ensemble evaluates the result. This is an excellent initiation into the essential concepts of influence and point of view. Characters can be added as needed.

Escalator

Perceiving harmonic function can be challenging in an ensemble setting, and Escalator is designed to help musicians distinguish their role from others around them. It's also a useful introduction to the idea of notes having jobs to do (tonic, dominant, passing tone, etc.). The ensemble will perform two or more scales, ascending and descending without repeating the apex, in a fixed rhythmic pattern. For example, in 4/4: three measures of quarter notes followed by one measure with two quarters and a half note (repeat). Divide the ensemble into two or more approximately equal sections. Section 1 begins the first scale. When they reach the third scale degree, Section 2 begins the same scale following the common "chord scale" routine. However, after completing the scale and rhythmic pattern, Section 1 moves immediately into a second scale and a brief harmonic clash ensues. Start the game with fewer sections, and harmonically related scales (circle of fifths).

Projection/Reflection

Begin with a pair of musicians, and identify a phrase or scale to be the focus. Ask one person to choose one note or moment to highlight (e.g. add an accent, or linger, or adjust the dynamic) as they perform the phrase. The model's task is to project their decision clearly, while the partner's first task is simply to identify what was highlighted. In round two, the partners are playing in unison, and the leader must influence the follower, through body language and musical inflection, to highlight the chosen moment too. In round three, both partners independently choose a moment to highlight, and each attempts to influence the other in performance. The game can be expanded to encompass an entire ensemble via sectional decisions (e.g. the flutes project/influence as the rest of the ensemble follows/imitates). The purpose is to develop in each person the ability to simultaneously send and receive musical information.

Any Ensemble, Any Amount of Time: Doing What Musicians Do

The ensemble building process springs directly from the diagnostic process. Your primary function when working with any ensemble, for any length of time, is to help everyone become a better musician – including yourself. The fundamental goal when working with any ensemble, for any length of time, is to exercise everybody’s artistic faculties – to do what the very best musicians do, and to get as near to them (the quality of their work, the characteristics of their thinking, and the depth of their emotional engagement) as you can.

Artistry is the deliberate exercise of all one’s faculties (intellect, emotion, technique, intuition) in a concerted effort to bring into being something that wasn’t there before.

Artistry is dependent upon divergent thinking, or the ability to see a broad spectrum of possibilities in ostensibly simple items or situations. Divergent thinking is dependent upon the ability to create and sustain open channels among all of the musicians in the ensemble, and between the musicians and their medium. In other words: to exist in a perpetual state of changeability (and its partner: vulnerability).

The context in which the musicians will do what they do is determined, in the Western Classical tradition, by the composer. It is colored by the performance practices of the composition’s genre and era. Therefore, score study is the process of discovering and clarifying the context (musical environment or landscape) in which the ensemble will play/work. Although the composer determines the basic parameters, the ability for the musicians to improvise within that context remains of paramount importance if artistry is to be achieved.

Think of it in these terms: the composer designs the playground, the conductor builds it according to those specifications, and the ensemble (including the conductor) plays on it. The conductor has to know the limits, location, and potential of each piece of equipment (the swings, the slide, the jungle-gym) in order to keep the ensemble as near to the intent of the composer as possible (to keep the kids from wandering into traffic). When the ensemble is on the playground, each musician must enjoy the freedom of divergent thinking (to climb on the slide, or swing side to side rather than back and forth, etc.). This freedom will enable the ensemble to get the most out of their time on the playground, and to demonstrate the full potential of the composer’s design to the listener. The ensemble, however, does not have the freedom to tear down, move, or ignore pieces of equipment. They must make every effort to respect the composer’s blueprint. Thus, the conductor also functions as a referee of sorts (“Johnny, please don’t eat the wood chips”).

In some special cases, as with a band with restricted resources, or in conducting “lab” ensembles, the

requisite building materials may not be available. For example, the composer may call for a swing set but all the ensemble can muster is a rope and a tire. The intent of swinging can be achieved, if not the exact method. However, if an ensemble doesn’t even have a rope, they should re-think whether a swinging-based playground design is a good fit for them. Intelligent, artistic literature selection and programming are essential skills for any conductor.

Musical Therapy

Using the playground analogy: if the playground design includes a slide, but the kids don’t know how to climb a ladder (or don’t have the strength), what will the conductor do to teach them or help them build the strength they will need to play on the slide? Answering “what will you do” = designing a course of musical therapy for the group, much like designing a course of occupational therapy for workers, or physical therapy for athletes.

Bear in mind that therapy is not rehearsal in the



traditional sense. It is more holistic than that. It attempts to treat the underlying illness (e.g. inability to maintain a steady pulse) rather than the symptom (imprecision or tempo trouble in a specific passage). Physical therapy for an athlete will make them more flexible, stronger, and quicker: all attributes that are valuable and transferable to any athletic endeavor. Musical therapy should be equally fundamental and transferrable to any musical context.

Your mission is to treat everybody eventually, but the time constraints of the rehearsal process necessitate sorting for efficiency. What will provide you and the ensemble the quickest access to the unfettered exercise of your artistic faculties? An added bonus: this process will result in the improvement of everyone’s musicianship, and it will improve the ensemble’s performance of any piece of music.

The opposite is not true. Attempting to improve the performance of a specific piece of music without attending to the musical and artistic needs of the ensemble (the holistic aspects) will prevent the unfettered exercise of artistic faculties and the improvement of musicianship. And, ironically, it will erode the ensemble’s ability to perform any

piece of music well. Mopping the Emergency Room floor may make a better picture for visitors, but it doesn’t help the guy who’s bleeding. Chasing notes and rhythms is not triage – it’s mopping the floor. It’s janitorial rather than medical. The conductor tuning each student’s violin, or holding the Korg in front of each clarinetist until they make the needle point straight up, is custodial rather than musical. A custodial/janitorial approach promotes convergent, rather than divergent thinking. This leads to intellectual disengagement, lack of focus, and fear or apathy. In short: it degrades musicianship and inhibits artistry. Sweeping the floor occasionally can be an efficient and necessary task – just don’t make it your *raison d’être*.

Rehearsal Planning

Planning is a constant state of mind for the conductor, based upon an “if...then...” thought process. The most effective plans are the result of Janusian thinking, or holding contradictory ideas in your mind and allowing their interplay to fuel the creation of new ideas. Janusian thinking enables musicians to view the rehearsal process as the simultaneous exercise of both convergent and divergent thinking and behavior. It also enables a conductor to remain flexible and improvisatory within an exhaustively detailed and carefully structured rehearsal agenda. In other words: we plan to be spontaneous.

In a large-scale sense, rehearsal planning is the last phase of a spiraling process that began with establishing foundations and goals. As each intermediate goal is achieved, the ensemble’s profile (musical and cultural) will evolve. New goals will be set based upon an ongoing diagnostic process that fuels subsequent rehearsal plans.

This circular structure is also present in miniature in each and every rehearsal. Musical and cultural foundations are established and reinforced, intuition and anticipation guide planning and execution, diagnosis determines what is needed and when, methods of therapy are deployed and developed, and the design of the rehearsal itself is tailored to the moment. All of this can – and should – happen in every session, no matter how brief.

Point of View
+
Influence
+
Listening (changeability)
+
Inspiration
(play & work)
=
Doing what musicians do

Developing Artistic Thinking in Rehearsal: Sample Plan (High School)

1:30 – 1:55 Diagnostic & preliminary ensemble building
Based on auditions, I anticipate over-arching issues with balance, intonation, and agility. However, initial warm up diagnostics will be designed to establish a common vocabulary, set expectations / targets, tweak curiosity, begin to create a sense of ensemble identity, and establish a playful yet focused atmosphere.

1. Unison Bb (friendly, but taken for granted; standard check point):
 - a. Goal: many sounds into one
 - b. Idea: tone is a choice (variable). Use the hall, use air & embouchure
 - i. Winds: “maw,” whirly air, relaxed shoulders
 - ii. Percussion: all on mallets, roll (steady, gentle, relaxed, balanced)
 - c. Link wind / air management to percussion timing

2. Long tones, vocal model: Do, DoReMiFaSol, DoMiSol, DoSol, Do
 - a. Goal: direct link from ears to technique (hear – play)
 - b. Idea: ears lead, fingers follow
 - i. Reminders: smooth (no woofing), relaxed, open air flow
 - ii. Many sounds into one

3. Tonal patterns, around F:
 - a. Goal: check for transfer. Bb is easy and leads to auto pilot. Also, unexpected patterns will reveal if ears and technique are actually connected
 - i. If yes (unlikely): move on
 - ii. If no (likely): playful response; guessing is good, help each other
 - iii. Challenge tends to serve as motivation for more accomplished students – something new to shoot for
 - iv. Reminders: whirly air, air in = air out

4. Find the rhythm game: conductor = target (vocal) for efficiency
 - a. Goal: find the target with your ears, hear it / hit it
 - b. Idea: help each other via movement, facial expression, eye contact
 - c. Try again, now with team awareness (should be quicker)
 - i. If yes: move on
 - ii. If no, pair up and link directly person to person
 - iii. Reminders: many sounds into one, tone is a choice

5. Target practice (split ensemble): do mi against do.....mi
 - a. Goal: hear the target, hit the target
 - b. Idea: be specific – hit the center, close doesn’t count
 - c. Set foundation for tuning, plant seeds for later ideas
 - i. Preliminary tuning isn’t pitch matching, it’s macro instrument adjusting
 - ii. Tuning should be quick – don’t wallow
 - iii. Tuning is a continual process: hear the target, hit the target (remember: the target moves)
 - iv. Tone matters; remind to relax, air in = air out, whirly

1:55 – 2:10 Smith: *Symphonic March on an English Hymn Tune*

- Who’s on your team? (layered design of march) Use “find the rhythm” thinking to determine to whom you link.

Play top to bottom, no stopping even if issues. Establish flow and tempo, build trust and confidence (even if you wipe out, we’ll help you jump back in; if you wipe out, the world won’t end – we’ll laugh and repair the problem).

Goal: let the ensemble find its level, and all make preliminary forays into influence.

Reward eye contact and movement / connection behaviors. Non-stop run also rewards preparation on the part of the students; those who practiced in advance are able to keep up, those who didn’t are left in the dust (with good humor)

Plant seeds: duple v. triple subdivision over constant pulse flow (conductor: make room in gesture to reflect subdivisions without adding back-beat). Tempo matters, and you don’t get to pick (catch up!)

2:10 – 2:20 Bryant: *The Marbled Midnight Mile*

- Send percussion to a practice room to coordinate Archer. These are complex parts and a little orientation will allay fears and confusion, and set them up for early success in the rehearsal process.
- Tone is a choice – many sounds into one (homophonic nature of ballad) see #1 & 2 in diagnostic above.

Play large chunk at beginning (A of form) to highlight trombones as lead color. Immediately seek to influence phrase shape and character of releases nonverbally. Listen for ideas from players and incorporate their momentum when possible. Similar concepts mm 24-33.

Show trust in clarinets at mm 36 by acknowledging effort (even if timid), and connecting gesturally. Any idea is a good one. Help connect flutes to clarinets via eye contact across the seating arc.

Give trumpet soloist an uninterrupted shot at mm 47-54 to establish context and demonstrate trust. Adopt collegial tone to coach (rather than directive) – builds confidence and independence, sets expectation. Follow similar tack through woodwind solos mm 54-62: chamber music model.

Play large chunk through peak (mm 71) to rough-out shape in a sculptural sense. Specifically identify peak, mark in parts – remind re: importance of pencils. Begin to mention form in conversational terms to establish vocabulary and indicate expectation re: players’ understanding of their work (challenges more advanced musicians, hints to others that there is a much larger universe they need to enter in order to keep up).

Play mm 80-99 to connect to and establish recapitulation, and give a sense of the larger shape of the work. Transfer roles from beginning.

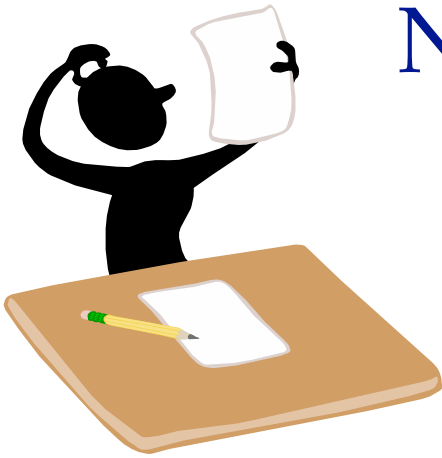
2:20 – 2:30 Archer: *Moorscape*

- Emphasize role of percussion to reconnect them to the winds, and to build awareness of their contributions to the team effort. Mention role of piano (not present yet) to explain gaps.
- As with Bryant, work in sections rather than attempting a complete run. This will emphasize form, which will help the players build a mental and emotional framework / context within which to work. Idea for later: once the sections are outlined, “color in” with distinct textures and tones to differentiate one from another. We’ll use the “ears lead” concept from diagnostic #2 & 3 above to help the ensemble grasp the ideas of atmosphere and gesture (rather than traditional melody / accompaniment).

Sections: mm 1-40, 41-53, 54-91, 92-110, 111-153, 154-165, 166-188, 189-end
Transfer non-verbal phrase shaping strategies from Bryant to “white note” material; be prepared to react and respond to harmonies to help ensemble accept diminished chords and clusters as kosher.

Transfer “who’s on your team” thinking from Smith (use find the rhythm listening skills). Idea for later: harmonic function as it relates to tuning (notes with jobs) – will help establish positive internal pressure to keep the structure of the less rhythmically active sections of the piece “inflated.”

Notes



Additional Resources

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Carolyn A. Barber (associate professor) earned a B.M. in horn performance at Northwestern University, an M.M. in horn performance from Yale University, and returned to Northwestern to earn her D.M. in conducting as a student of John P. Paynter and Victor Yampolsky.

Dr. Barber began her career as a lecturer and assistant to the dean of the Northwestern University School of Music. Her duties included teaching advanced conducting and directing the university's 118-piece Concert Band. Prior to her appointment at UNL, Dr. Barber served as the director of bands at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Apart from her conducting and teaching at UW-L, Dr. Barber also served for five years as the principal horn of the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra.

As director of bands at UNL, her teaching assignment is now a hybrid of traditional academic courses and performance-based courses. This combination provides a rich atmosphere for the cross-pollination of ideas, techniques, and creative problem solving. Dr. Barber's chief area of research is conducting practice and pedagogy, and her research fuels and is fueled by her work in both the classroom and the concert hall.

Dr. Barber has received numerous awards for musical and academic achievement, including the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts Distinguished Teaching Award, two National Band Association Citations of Excellence, and a United States Navy Good Conduct Medal. Her research interests include a wide variety of recording projects, and a growing list of commissions of new works for wind band. Her writing has been published in the *Journal of Band Research*, and she is a regular contributor to the *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* reference series. Dr. Barber maintains an active schedule as a guest conductor and clinician. She has presented at venues including the Midwest Clinic, as well as CBDNA, ASTA and MENC conferences.

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