

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT STRING & ORCHESTRA EDUCATION TODAY

With Marvin Rabin

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Introduction

Nurture over Nature is my credo regarding pedagogy. I agree with Suzuki that young people are all talented.

Early childhood education is desirable. Suzuki was advocating and practicing this in 1947.

The teacher is the method. It behooves us all to continue to assess and recreate our own pedagogy. The best method will never be written.

Every graduating high school senior should have a music career as an option upon entering a program in higher education. This implies a previous preparation in music not necessary for other career programs, where general academics are required to qualify for admission. If a student achieves the level of advancement that creates music as a choice, music will also be a vital resource for living, even if a musical career is not pursued.

The true formula for learning is not to attempt the impossible task of predicting the future uses of what is to be learned. Rather, providing insight and understanding makes the subject usable in variable situations.

Besides work in music, my background also includes study and research in the social sciences and learning theory. My doctoral dissertation was on the youth symphony orchestra movement in the United States. I also did research on string programs and youth orchestras in Europe. These ensembles symbolize what our creative youth can do despite their busy schedules. They join together to share values and gain status from both peers and adults. They become models for others to emulate.

The ultimate criterion for judging the success of music education lies in its effect upon pupils' lives and the extent to which they have learned. Do they seek to refine and extend musical competencies? Do they seek opportunities to play and sing with others? Do they have a cd collection? Do they go to concerts regularly? Answers to such questions as these reveal the extent to which music education affects the lives of those who participate in it.

From Foundations and Principles of Music Education (Leonhard and House

Regarding String Pedagogy

String instruments are uniquely suited for group instruction. Almost everything that is heard is related to something visible. This is not as true in wind or vocal performance where sound, for the most part, is produced internally. The four-string structure of string instruments lends itself to a cyclic repetition of skills on each string. The stylistic variation with the bow adds to the unique string pedagogy. The pedagogy should be experience centered, not problem centered. Group teaching provides opportunities for creative review, consolidation of skills, introduction of new skills, performance readiness, and expanded repertoire and ensemble experience. Group experiences provide the opportunity for participants to demonstrate accomplishments as well as share and explore their own ideas of interpretation and literature with their peers. Students are given opportunities for psychological ownership of ideas.

Mixed-string class instruction, in my opinion, has limitations and is not efficient.

Concerning the Orchestra

Numbers 1-10 of the following are quotes taken from Craig Kirchoffs 1992 Midwest Clinic Presentation:

1. The art of conducting vs. the act of conducting: Art has musical purpose and reason in every move.
2. A conductor's most important challenge is the expressive challenge showing a sensitivity to every nuance and moment in the music.
3. Effective conducting is effective rehearsal technique.
4. Let the music drive the technique.
5. Performers and listeners tend to remember how the music felt rather than how the music sounded.
6. A much repeated statistic in popular literature: ninety-three percent of the meaning of an exchange comes from non-verbal cues, leaving only seven percent to be carried by verbal utterance. (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967)
7. Predictability destroys the opportunity for a genuine and meaningful aesthetic experience.
8. "The score contains everything except the most important thing."
(Gustav Mahler)
9. Things of the soul are difficult if not impossible to communicate through verbalization.
10. The expression of your eyes or your general facial expressions can tell the players more about the music than fancy hand-waving. (Max Rudolf)
11. The conductor is the most important audience for orchestra players.

12. When making verbal comments during rehearsal, make them in the style and tempo of the piece being rehearsed.
13. Special moments should take place in a concert that do not happen at a rehearsal.
14. Be enthusiastic about the music you select for your ensemble.

Thoughts About Music

1. Rushing is often caused by poor phrasing of rhythmic patterns. The most frequently violated rhythmic patterns are: a) dotted quarter followed by 8th note b) 8th note followed by two 16ths c) two 16ths followed by an 8th d) in an allegro tempo, a 16th following a dotted 8th is not always an exact 16 but more often is a 25th note.
2. Know where the gesture note is in melodic and rhythmic passages, such as four sixteenth notes followed by a quarter note. To prevent rushing, send the cluster to the beat, don't drive it to the beat.
3. Understand the presence of tension and release inherent in a phrase and the role of the appoggiatura in melodic lines.
4. All notes of duration have direction. They are either going to or leaving some place.
5. Understand the significance of articulation symbols in a scores and or parts in terms of musical and stylistic context. Different composers have different interpretations of articulation symbols.
6. Never compromise the integrity of musical performance with the conducting problems you may have.
7. Understand the relationship of bow speed, bow distribution, bow weight and sound point to avoid musical spasms.
8. It is more difficult to know when not to play than when to play. That infinitesimal space between notes is a critical key to style.
9. Space and articulations are needed between notes in syncopated rhythms.
10. In rhythmic passages, repeated pitches need more articulation than changed pitches.
11. Do not be victimized by or destroy the musicality of a composition by poor bowings and editing by arrangers, some of whom may be musical illiterates.
12. Bowings: Always start from the string after a silence.
13. Understand the differences in bow speeds with cellos and double basses versus violins and violas.
14. Transcriptions are welcomed, but always examine the original full score, particularly from the classical and baroque periods. Written tempi and stylistic errors (i.e. arrangement of Russian Sailors Dance) should be avoided. are located in the rear of the orchestra. They play with the ensemble sound they hear rather than with the conductors beat.

15. Timpani, tubas, horns, and double basses tend to sound behind the beat in the orchestra. This is due to the nature of the instruments and the fact that they
16. PLEASE, no accents before a rest, unless indicated. They are unmusical and result in rushing.
17. Know the characteristics of brass, woodwind and percussion instruments, their intonation and articulation concerns, projection, colors and placement in the orchestra. Note trombonists who play with their heads down because the slides go under the music stands, causing them to breathe incorrectly.
18. Avoid having two flute players play on one stand. It is not possible for both players to have the correct playing position and see the conductor or the music.

QUOTES

“There is no such thing as a definitive performance.” (Roger Sessions)

" I don't think there is work of art that we know and prize that does not have in it something deeply uncertain, something unresolved which in fact can never be resolved-otherwise we wouldn't be dealing with it and at the same time deeply anxious." Piano Pieces (Russell Sherman)

Buckminster Fuller's observation in response to a question about his creative life:
“I was born **cross eyed** and viewed the world differently.” Open Mind Whole World (Bob Samples)