

JON MICHAEL IVERSON

MMTA Convention 2009

Fostering the Musician's Spirit:

Developing and Nurturing Musicality in Students

Identifying Musicality

- Frank Mannheimer: "Musicality deals with the music *behind* the notes."
- Joanne Smith: "Musicality is the expression of that which comes from within." Musicianship, then, "is the ability – the skill – to decipher *what* is to be expressed."

*The aim of art is not to represent the outward appearance of things,
but their inward significance.*

– Aristotle

The Influence, Education and Governance of Musicality

1. Expressiveness – Emotion – Psychology – Psychological states – Maturity
2. Inflection – Nuance – Subtlety
3. Passion – Drama – Acting – Performance Choreography
4. Active Listening – Pre-audiation – Informed Listening (knowing what to listen for)
5. Intention – Meaning – Conscious thought – Awareness
6. Inspiration – Imagination – Musical conceptualization
7. Interpretation – Translation of the printed score – Performance practices – Musical style
8. Articulation – Ornamentation – Touch
9. Technique – Ability – Mastery – Control – Command – Fluency
10. Aptitude – Generalship – Naturalness – Talent – The *X-factor*
11. Dance and Song – Nature – Personification – Music-ification
12. Semiotics – Symbolism – Imitation
13. Gender-appropriateness – Class-appropriateness – Cultural-appropriateness
14. Line – Contour – Shape – Direction – Motion
15. Rubato – Timing – Phrasing – Dynamic control
16. Tension and Release – Resolution
17. Creativity – Compose – Improvise
18. Spirituality – *Soul* – Empathy [an understanding of the human experience]
19. Beauty – Art – the Sublime – Transcendence


JON MICHAEL IVERSON

Developing, Nurturing, and Empowering Musicality

Finding Flow

Flow is an almost euphoric mental state where a where a person is fully immersed in an activity with a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success. Flow can be found in the short term (in a performance, for example), but should be aimed for over the long term by regularly engaging in moments of flow.

1. *Repertoire*

- *The early stages*
 - Appropriately matched to the personality of the student
 - Is music that somehow resonates with the student
 - Music that the student finds appealing, likable or attractive
 - Repertoire that is in a musical language they can understand and relate to
- *The later stages*
 - Somehow expands the horizons of a students understanding of music
 - Can be in direct contradiction to their personality type (i.e., giving a shy girl a bombastic piece; giving a high school male a slow lyrical piece)
 - Music of from an unfamiliar genre or era

2. *Sequencing of repertoire*

- *Appropriate and logical progression of repertoire selection*
 - Spiral musical concepts and technical challenges
 - Create a step-by-step sequence of music that meets a student's skill to the challenge of the new piece on a 1:1 ratio
 - Piggyback ideas from one selection to another so students aren't learning entirely new sets of information for each piece

3. *Avoid routine and predictability*

- *In lessons*
 - Lessons don't always have to follow the same format from week to week
 - Start with scales one week
 - Begin with problem areas within a newly assigned piece the next
 - Keep in mind right-brained and left-brained activities during lessons
 - Theory is a left-brained activity while performing is a right-brained activity
 - It can be difficult (and frustrating) to make the shift between left- and right-brained activities during lessons – keep them lumped together
- *In practice* – as students progress, their practice habits must change also
 - 30 minutes may be too long for a young beginner
 - Boredom can set in around the 20 minute mark
 - Instead, try breaking it up into two 15-minute daily increments

- High school students may not have the time to practice at the keyboard
 - Take their scores to school; have them mentally practice on the bus, or in study hall
 - Take advantage of lulls in their calendar year
 - Allow for monitored flexibility of their practice
4. *Variety – keeping things fresh*
- *Repertoire selection*
 - Variety of styles, genre and composers
 - Different layers of difficulty and challenge
 - Quick-study pieces
 - Long-term pieces
 - *Activities outside the lesson*
 - Studio classes
 - Labs, listening assignments
 - Group activities: camps, festivals, etc.
 - Competitions, contests
 - Performances
 - *In teaching*
 - Present concepts in a variety of different ways
 - Presentation of ideas during the lesson doesn't have to be the same with each new concept
 - For more academic learning, have students do their own research on a topic
 - Ear training on the computer *and* in person, for example
 - Vary how musical information is disseminated throughout their studies
 - Be flexible as the student grows to tailor their studies to them, not your teaching
5. *Environment*
- *Student must feel comfortable in a learning environment in order that they*
 - Feel free to express themselves, both musically and personally
 - Feel safe making mistakes
 - Are encouraged to grow and learn in ways appropriate to them
 - Do not feel threatened
 - Are not exploited
 - *Home environment that*
 - Is conducive their musical studies
 - Is supportive and encouraging
 - Is in agreement and alignment with the teachers wishes
 - Promotes and enforces regular practice
 - May include siblings and/or parents who play or sing

The voice is the first instrument experienced by human beings not only as individuals, but as a species as well. Singing strengthens the *internal* generation of music.

1. *Sing while they play*

- *Gives the music a sense of line, direction and phrasing*
 - “Can you play this while singing this line in one breath?”
 - Can gain a better understanding of interval structure (and what it physically takes to reach those high notes while they sing)
 - Will hear the end of a phrase – the end of long slurs will be tapered as they run out of breath
 - Taps into their stream of consciousness
 - Makes the music more personal as they are now more physically in control of the melody or phrase

2. *... while they're not playing*

- *Sing everywhere all the time*
- *Solidifies memory*
- *Reinforces the physical connection to music making*

3. *Write lyrics*

- *Lyrics should match the music*
 - In mood and emotion
 - In meter
 - The prose and its cadence should match the melodic rhythm
- *Consider the vernacular language of the composer*
 - The natural rhythm of a spoken language effects melody
 - Melody rhythm
 - Word placement in the mouth
 - The role of vowels and consonances
- *Examples:*
 - Singing “Lie-be dich” for the opening statement of Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 31, No. 3. (“Ich lie-be dich” for mm. 3-6.)
 - Italian *bel canto* for Chopin Nocturnes
 - Thinking of a closed “Mmmm” for the end of a long note on clarinet
 - Paraphrased critique about Yo-Yo Ma’s artistry: “He has such a wide variety of attacks, releases and approaches of the bow to the string that his playing has almost a speech-like quality.”

4. *Vocalize*

- *Vocalize pieces away from the instrument*
 - No words, just sounds and utterances
 - Not unlike how a conductor might demonstrate an instrumental part
- *Scat*

1. To themselves

- *For beautiful tone production, but also for*
 - Dynamic shape
 - Phrasing
 - Color
 - Articulation
 - Line
- *Record themselves*
 - Audio record
 - This takes the tactile sensation out of the listening process
 - Allows them to listen to what they're doing without having to watch, play and listen simultaneously
 - Gives them an objective perspective of their own playing
 - Video record
 - Provides an opportunity to see technical issues
 - Students can see their performance choreography
 - Can see and hear where things need to be timed better

2. To related works

- *Closely numbered works, or works of the same genre, by the composer they're playing*
 - Gives a context for a composers output during that period
 - Can hear instrumental influences
 - Find recordings of alternate orchestrations of the same piece
 - Examples,
 - Listen to all works for Clarinet and Orchestra by Mozart
 - Listen to Beethoven's string quartets if playing Op. 101
 - Listen to the fully orchestrated Mahler songs, if accompanying
- *The music of contemporaries of the composer they're playing*
 - Provides historical context
 - To hear what lesser composers were doing at the time

3. Guided listening

- *Listen to a recording with a student*
 - Point out what was good about the performance
 - Identify less desirable points about a performance
 - Aimed at a student understanding the thought process behind your decision making skills
- *Composition students can benefit from seeing orchestration and instrumentation practices in play, as well as compositional devices and techniques*

1. Performing

- *From Day One as a beginner*
- *From memory*
- *Builds confidence, esteem, character*
- *As their ability improves, have them perform the same piece multiple times*
 - *Let students live with their music*
 - *Allows them to internalize the piece*
 - *Improved comfort in performing*

2. Memorizing

- *Again, from Day One*
- *Makes memorization a regular part of the music making process*
- *Should help making memorizing easier later in their studies*
- *Helps shape how they think about practicing and making music*

3. Reading and researching

- *Read age-appropriate magazines*
- *Internet reading about their composers*
- *Tour musical instrument museums*
- *Read about time period for historical context of their pieces*
- *Experience art from the same time period*

4. Sight reading

- *Sight read music that is below their ability level*
 - *Good for an early advanced player who would sight read intermediate level music*
 - *Utilize newly acquired musicianship skills*
 - *Find places to inflect, for example*
 - *Good for phrasing, dynamics, etc.*
- *Young composers can benefit from seeing how less sophisticated music is put together*
 - *Depending on the composer, can be good for understanding musical style*
 - *Can easily see the use of sequences, both pitch and rhythmic*

5. Teaching

- *Once a student has acquired a skill – or is in the process of gaining mastery of it – have them teach it to you*
 - *Should help put things in place for the student*
 - *Will show where any holes in their learning may have occurred*
- *Is based on the concept “if you can’t explain it to someone, it may not be clear to you.”*

1. Emotional Depth

- *Improvise in order to gain a deeper emotional understanding of themselves*
 - Not only a good outlet, but helps connect feelings to musical sound
 - “Improvise for 10 minutes focusing on [such-and-such emotion]”
 - Do so repeatedly, but with a variety of emotions
 - This should be a timed event as students will initially feel awkward and want to stop prematurely
- *Brainstorm a list of emotional states*
 - An ongoing list within their music/assignment books
 - Students can refer to this when learning new music: “what emotion do you connect with this [section/variation]?”
- *Repeat a phrase multiple times, each time seeking yet a deeper emotional connection to the phrase*
 - Not only for expressive passages, but for humorous and lively sections too
 - This then becomes a practice strategy

2. Over-exaggerate

- *Properties of a piece*
 - Over-exaggerate dynamics and/or articulation
 - Have them use *too* much rubato
 - Slow the tempo down or speed it down
 - “Play this piece *too* happy, or *too* sad.”
 - At the end of this, talk with the student about which decision might be best
- *The danger here is making the music schmaltzy – things need to return to the appropriate proportion when the over-exaggeration exercise is finished*

3. Experiment

- *Take a passage and perform the passage eight different times*
 - A different mood, character or feeling should be employed each time
 - Some moods should be close to the desired result
 - Other moods should be in direct opposition to the desired result
- *Try different articulation markings for a passage that aren’t found in the score*
 - Listen for how the mood changes
 - Focus on how it *feels* to play
- *Experiment with different chord voicings or progressions through a passage or cadence*
- *Ask the question, “what would a lesser composer have done? What would that have sounded like?”*

4. Inflection

- *A saturated amount of emotion in a small handful of notes*
- *Helps with expressiveness in general, and beautifies playing*
 - Feel a “leaning in” into three to five notes
 - More easily teachable in a series of quicker notes
 - Places to be inflected can be found initially by looking for slurs
 - Inflection in slow, *expressivo* sections is more challenging
 - Revisit old piece to find places to inflect
- *Requires conscious thought and active listening at first, but becomes more natural later*

5. Emotional connection

- *Mediate emotion by framing it in terms a student understands:*
 - “Have you ever felt [this way]? Can you demonstrate that emotion musically?”
 - Then, “can you allow us to feel it yet *even more*?”
- *Make the music relevant to students on their terms, by their accord, in emotions they understand*

* * *

Moving

1. Dance and Dalcroze

- *Early Childhood Music / Early Childhood Arts*
 - Helps strengthen from early on the connection between music and physical movement
 - Helps instill rhythmic pulse
 - Greater neurological development
- *Dalcroze Eurhythmics*
 - the learning of rhythm, structure, and musical expression through movement
 - Solfege
 - Improvisation
- *Move while listening to music, a la William Westney’s “The Un-Master Class”*
 - Gets us “out of the box”
 - Helps make music a physical embodiment
- *Learn the basic steps of Baroque dance*
 - Historical context
 - Reinforce meter, movement and Affekt of a dance or movement

2. *Conduct*

- Simple four- or three- patterns to young students
- Older students can use more sophisticated gestures
 - “Conduct me through the *crescendo* as I play this ... “
 - Have students demonstrate rubato through their conducting
- Again, this is to help make music a physical embodiment, but also removes their instrument from the music making process

3. *Performance choreography*

- Matching physical movement of a performance to the mood of the piece
 - Quiet hands for quiet music
 - Crisp releases for the ends of exciting sections or passages
- May feel unnatural at first
 - May appear uncoordinated at first as well
 - The goal is to get a performer’s physical approach to a piece to match its character

* * *

Learning in Groups

1. *Ensembles*

- *Band, choir or orchestra*
- *Duets or trios*
- *Chamber ensembles*

2. *Studio class*

- *Performance and listening opportunity*
- *Provides for latent learning*

3. *Accompanying*

- *Opportunity to learn music outside of one’s solo instrument repertory*
- *Following and timing*

4. *Dyadic teaching*

- *Teaching in pairs*
- *Sharing of thoughts and ideas between students*

5. *Student compositions*

- *Have students perform the compositions of fellow students*
- *Excellent experience for all students involved*

1. Listening

- *Listen to everything*
 - All styles, all composers, all genre, all composers
 - To music that are unfamiliar with, and that they might not like
- *Suggest a change in listening habits*
- *Provide listening lists of suggested pieces and/or performers*
- *iTunes and YouTube are gold mines*

2. Attending

- *Recitals, concerts, performances*
- *Camps, festivals, lectures, demonstrations*

3. Following along with the music

- *With a recording*
- *Orchestral, opera, ensemble, or chamber scores*
 - Good for young composers
 - They can visually see the complete work
 - To hear realized orchestration and instrumentation techniques
 - Can experience compositional devices in the score

4. Reading

- *Music books and editions*
- *Magazines and music comic books*
- *Internet websites for students*
- *Composer biographies*
- *More scholarly works*

* * *

Creating

1. Improvise

- *On an emotion*
- *On a musical idea*
 - “What can you do with this sequence?”
 - “What textures can you create from this [set of pitches]?”

2. Compose

- Exposes students to the creative process
- Gives them first-hand experience in musical creation

3. Visual imagery

- Create visual images, drawings or depictions of their pieces
 - Use a variety of textures, colors and lines
- Use description vocabulary in explaining a possible scene found within the piece
 - Have students describe what's happening
 - Use the title of the piece to direct the student's imagination

4. Mapping

- Drawing or creating some type of "map" for their piece, *a la Rebecca Shockley*
 - Helps students view their music from yet another perspective
 - Frames their music in a more objective way
 - Good for solidifying memory
 - The creation or depiction of their piece helps personalize the meaning of the music

5. Narrative

- Create or understand the story or narrative that accompanies a piece of music
- Classical period
 - There are topics contained within each section of music (within a Classical sonata, for example)
 - Helps enliven the music from generic titles such as "Sonata"
- Found naturally in the Romantic period
 - Character pieces (Schumann's *Papillons* or *Carnival*)
 - Specific musical "paintings" (Smetana's "Moldau," from *Ma Vlast*)
 - Tone poems (Strauss' *Don Quixote*)
 - Thematic transfiguration (Liszt's *Sonata in B minor*)
- Found throughout Impressionistic works as well
 - Debussy placing the name of his *Preludes* at the end of the piece
 - Ravel using themes of the "exotic" – *Alborada del Gracioso* (Spanish), *Tzigane* (Gypsy) and *Cinq Melodies Populaires Grecques* (Greek)

Albergo, Cathy, Reid Alexander and Marvin Blickenstaff. *Handbook for Teachers from the Celebration Series Perspectives*. Mississauga, Ontario, Canada: Frederick Harris Music Co., 2008.

Bernstein, Seymour. *With Your Own Two Hands*. Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1981.

Clarfield, Ingrid Jacobson and Dennis Alexander. *Keys to Artistic Performance, Books 1, 2 and 3*. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 2008.

Hisey, Andrew and Christopher Norton. *Christopher Norton Connections for Piano: Activities, Levels 1-8*. Mississauga, Ontario, Canada: Frederick Harris Music Co., 2007.

Westney, William. *The Perfect Wrong Note*. Cambridge: Amadeus Press, 2009.



JON MICHAEL IVERSON