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8 Fostering Student Independence

GREAT PROGRESS WAS made at the last lesson, and you are really looking forward to hearing your student this week to continue building on that momentum. You can't believe your eyes and ears when he plays for you as if that last lesson never happened. "Did you practice?" you ask. "Yes, every day," he replies, and by the earnest response you have to believe it. If it's really true that this student practiced every day, you wonder, what on earth is the problem? How is it possible that nothing improved between lessons?

The answer could be complex, but it's probably not. Lessons go well because the teacher directs every move the student makes and masterminds solutions to every problem. Because this is the teaching path of least resistance, students often become entirely dependent on their teachers to work productively. Progress away from the lesson setting won't happen if students didn't notice what the teacher noticed, or if they don't know why the teacher made a correction. Even if students can remember how to recreate a correction, they'll still be at a loss if they can't remember what the newly improved way is supposed to sound like, feel like, or look like.

On a practical level, students need their teachers to give them information and guidance to learn to play well. However, teachers can't simply supply their students with all the answers and expect that they'll take care of the rest. The key to nurturing

independence is to use the lesson time not just to offer information, but to show the student why the information is important and how to use it effectively.

In other words, the "do this" part of teaching is only the first step. To be certain that students are aware of how an improvement is made, a teacher can create approaches to teaching that fully engage the student. Here are some examples:

- Demonstrate first, pointing out and describing what you're doing, hearing, feeling, and seeing—or have the student describe what they hear and see. Prompt with questions like "Do you think I'm tight or relaxed?" You can verify or adjust the answers accordingly.
- Ask your student to copy your sound or movement and describe what he sees, hears, and feels as he imitates. Give feedback and help him make adjustments.
- Continue the process until he has arrived at the desired position, sound, or movement. Be sure this is a "big deal" moment—lots of praise and excitement—followed by focused attention and repetitions.
- Have your student explain what he did in his own words, and how he'll be able to rediscover the desired result again during practice.
- Turn the tables by acting as a student with a similar problem and have your student "teach" you.

This kind of teaching routine greatly increases students' awareness of their technique: not just fixing a problem but knowing what they will see, feel, and hear when it's working. It's still not a guarantee that such an approach will always bring clarity to their independent practice, but certainly the possibility is greatly increased from the "Do-it-this-way" approach.

The "Path of Least Resistance" Problem

If this kind of teaching is the best way to increase awareness and get students thinking for themselves, then why don't teachers naturally gravitate to it? Let's look at the typical reasons:

- *It takes so much time.* The "do this" approach can lead to a quick fix which initially seems more efficient. However, if you consider the number of hours of heedless practicing that would probably follow, the ten minutes it might take to raise awareness and reinforce understanding is time well spent.

- *It's too easy to tell them what to do because we know and they don't.* When a multilayered answer to "Why didn't that sound good?" is painfully obvious to us, watching our students struggle to identify just one reason sometimes takes more patience than we think we have.
- *Students are often resistant to making observations.* "I don't know" is an easy way to get out of responding when teachers jump in with the answer immediately. Students might also be afraid they'll be "wrong" or believe that being a good student means being quiet and doing what the teacher says.
- *It's too easy to assume our students understand more than they do.* After all, when we say "Do you understand?" or "Does that make sense?" students usually say yes. Yet ask them to explain a concept or technique back to us and, more often than not, the reality is an entirely different matter.

So the answer to all these problems is this: it is never a waste of time to ask students to observe themselves, critique themselves, and demonstrate understanding of technique, musical concepts, and effective practice. Teachers are wise to ask more questions, and not rush in when their students struggle to answer. Let's look at some fundamental areas in which student independence is essential to our students' development.

Consider This

Students who care about improving their skills and musicianship will eventually assimilate some critiquing and practicing skills, but many years often go by before this happens. Compare this to the fact that before they learn to drive, many students (even teenagers) are challenged to give someone good directions to their house. Why? Because someone else has always been responsible for getting them there: so many trips to and from—so many observations and corrections—with no real need to pay attention. So the sooner we can put them in the driver's seat, the better . . . with musicianship, that is.

Essential Skills of Independent Musicians

PHYSICAL BASIS FOR TONE PRODUCTION

The posture and physical freedom of any young musician is a strong predictor of future advanced technique. A free, comfortable setup forms the foundation for growth and musical independence. Depending solely on one half-hour lesson per week to establish a student's fundamental technique is a painfully slow method if the student doesn't understand what to observe in her own playing.

For instance, consider this scenario, when a cello teacher recognizes tension in a student's shoulders that is affecting the tone on the C string.

"Relax your shoulders and just use your arm weight to get into the string—great, that's perfect. How does that feel? 'Weird,' you say? That's okay, you're not used to that feeling yet. Let's just say that this week it might feel 'weird.' As long as your shoulders are down and relaxed and your arm feels heavy, just consider right now that 'weird' is good. Look in the mirror. What do you see when your shoulders are up? Now put them down. What's the difference? Right . . . When your shoulders were up, I couldn't see your neck either! Keep watching to be sure you can see it when you are practicing."

The student plays again on the C string. "Can you hear a change in your sound when your shoulders are down? What is the difference? Close your eyes . . . can you hear it? Can you feel the difference when your eyes are closed? You can feel the cello vibrating more? Great! This week I want you to play open C strings every day for two or three minutes—play in front of the mirror and watch—what will you see? Your neck! Good!—then close your eyes and listen for the sound and feeling of relaxed shoulders and arm, and feel your cello vibrating as much as possible."

> **Personal Inventory:** Choose one aspect of fundamental setup from your list of techniques in Chapter 3, *Technique*. Create a scenario similar to the one you just read, including ideas for guiding a student's awareness with visual, aural, verbal, and kinesthetic learning approaches, and offering practice suggestions.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

You can safely assume that students don't know how to practice unless they have been taught. Like any technique important to your instrument, it is a skill that must be learned. Lessons are the only opportunity teachers have to influence the practicing students do at home. While teaching students how practice takes time, and likely means you won't cover as much other material that day, in the big picture, it is one of the most high-return investments a teacher can make.

Observation and Critiquing

The first step in an effective practice routine is to notice what needs work. Yet for most students the default setting is to give little or no thought to what to improve, with the exception of "learning the notes" or "getting through the piece." While teachers are often quick to blame students for this inept approach to practicing, we must realize it is primarily our own fault if in lessons we endlessly repeat the cycle of

"problem happens; teacher makes suggestions." If students never have the opportunity to self-critique and problem-solve, it's no surprise that they don't understand the process.

The most direct way to teach students how to observe and critique themselves is quite simple: after your students play, but before you say anything, ask them what *they* noticed. Be forewarned, however, that if you've never taught this way before, you can't expect your students to be enthusiastic about this turn of the tables. Comfortable with their passive role in lessons, students aren't always happy about this added responsibility and the effort it takes. Some sincerely believe that it is the job of a good teacher to make all the observations, and that it is the job of a good student to follow directions, period. Students might also be concerned that their observations might be "wrong" and they don't want to take that risk.

> **Consider This**
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> Note to teachers: remember there is no wrong answer to the question "What did you notice?" Whatever the answer, it is what the student noticed, whether astute or misguided. "OK, let's go back and check that" is an appropriate response to any observation, since the problem is less that they made a bad choice, and more that they really don't know what they were hearing, good or bad. Let students "fix" what they consider to be the problem: once an already-even run is consciously made even—or an already-tuned note is clarified as in tune—students' awareness is greatly increased, and their attention (with your encouragement, when needed) will turn toward resolving more significant issues.

Pressed for an observation, students might respond with vague or evasive answers.

"It sounded bad" is a catch-all answer based on the assumption that something had to be bad or the teacher wouldn't be asking. "*What* sounded bad?" is the follow-up to the first answer—make sure the observation includes both *what* went wrong and *where* it went wrong.

"It was okay" leaves things open-ended: some things good, some not. Ask the "okay" responders to tell you something they liked and something they didn't, again with appropriate specifics, such as "I liked my vibrato at the beginning, but the legato section didn't sound smooth."

"I don't know" usually means they really want the teacher to return to the old default setting of supplying all the answers (and hopefully to never attempt this again).

To help jump-start their thinking, you might want to offer a checklist of components—"How was your rhythm? Tone? Phrasing? Pedaling? Bowing? Intonation?" and so forth. But if a more specific critique isn't forthcoming, don't consider for a moment telling students what you heard—simply have them play again (a few times, if necessary) until they can make a real observation.

If asked often enough, students' resistance to this routine wears down, and they begin to expect it, which at minimum makes them more attentive—an excellent step in the right direction. Over time, their responses will gradually need less prompting and assistance from you. As that happens, you can encourage them to be more analytical about discovering the source of the problem. Draw your student's attention to fine details of technique, looking "under the microscope" for subtle adjustments that can make significant differences in overall performance ability.

> **Consider This**
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> Encourage all your students to start their observations with something positive, since being aware of what was good reinforces the ultimate desired outcome: "My tone was good in the second section" or "I exaggerated the dynamics"—and allow them the chance to reinforce their best playing: let them do it again, describe what they hear and why it's working, and perhaps consider how to make it better still. The goal is for students to become observant of *everything* they do—and in fact focusing on their best playing or singing helps them access it more readily in every situation.

Teaching Students to Practice Effectively

> It's scary to realize I was teaching lessons in such a haphazard manner: randomly assigning repertoire, and simply expecting my young students to know how to practice. When I finally started working with a teacher who not only described how to practice, but went through practice routines in my lesson, my practicing became well organized, my progress was evident, and I was much more self-motivated. My success prompted me to help my own students who were struggling to see evidence of change from week to week.
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> RECENT GRADUATE

Once your student has identified a problematic area, give him a few minutes to resolve the problem independently. You will likely observe several weaknesses in the practice routine: practicing hurriedly and making many mistakes, not repeating a

correction often enough, being distracted by other problems and forgetting the original goal, and so on. After you've seen which issues are most problematic, guide him through a more productive process, pointing out which areas need the most attention.

It's important to note that students, especially younger ones, do not understand the value of repetition—in fact, to many of them, repeating a correction twenty times is punishment. (Remember, they aren't required to solve the same math problem twenty times to show they understand it.) A conversation about the brain—how synapses are created and how automaticity is developed—can be critical information in persuading students the repetition is a necessary part of their work. Be sure to discuss the importance of correct repetitions, since the brain will remember anything it is taught. Compare performing to test-taking: while they might get several tries at a math problem, and can even skip it and return to solve it later, in a performance there is only one time to do it, and one chance to get it right. (See Chapter 4, *Practicing*, for more discussion on this topic.)

Practicing in lessons need not be a spontaneous event. If practicing notes were made at the previous lesson, a student can demonstrate how that plan was implemented, so you can see how effective the notes were, and how well the student was able to follow directions. (See the next section for more about practice plans.) More mature students can explain how they practiced if it is warranted. Nevertheless, their improved performance will be the evidence of successful practicing, and the remaining problematic areas will be the focus of further review and modified plans.

Once the student knows how to fix a problem, however, don't allow yourself to slip back into "business as usual" by making the corrections yourself. Begin to place some responsibility on the student: "You just did a great job fixing a very similar problem five minutes ago, so I know you can take care of this without my help." While nothing can guarantee that students will work with clarity and focus when they go home, such lessons in independence, especially when incorporated into the weekly routine, significantly increases the likelihood of productive independent practice.

Notes, Goals, and Practice Plans

Students do not always make the connection between what the teacher does with them at a lesson and how they will practice at home. Solving a problem during a lesson can be considered a one-time fix in a student's mind, unless the teacher deliberately points out that this same work needs to continue throughout the week. Therefore, at least initially, teachers need to show students how to translate a lesson into a practice plan for the week.

Be very wary of charts or assignments that seem to suggest that the number of hours or minutes practiced is the primary goal. The best practice plans are goal-directed; therefore goals accomplished, not time spent, should be established as the focus. Younger students usually need some kind of practice checklist, as well as a notebook to record specific directions on how to practice each assignment. You or a parent can write about specific sections to be practiced, what the student must watch or listen for, how many repetitions are required, specified tempo variations, exercises, and so forth. Mature students can be encouraged to write their own notes, either during or just before the end of the lesson. These lesson notes can be coupled with more general handouts like a glossary of practice techniques, basic checklists, or a "practicing pitfalls" sheet to support their independent work.

No matter the age of your students, end-of-the-lesson questions work well to reinforce what was covered in the lesson and ensure understanding and focus for the coming week: "What did we do today?" or "What will you practice this week?" Don't let students answer "I'm going to practice my scale, my etude, and my piece." Students should be able to mention specific goals that require attention, including what they remember from their "in-lesson practice session." Verbalizing goals in their own words help to create a direct connection between students and their work. This recall time also offers an opportunity to reassert—and clarify if necessary—the most important elements covered in the lesson.

Foster an independent streak in your most mature students by encouraging them to develop specific techniques on their own. Start by defining a skill and determining their current level of accomplishment. Establish a final standard of mastery, and then suggest a practice process for development

> **Consider This**
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> To some students, there is nothing more important than getting to the end of the piece without stopping, and "learning the next piece in the book" is the primary goal of lessons. In these cases, students (and sometimes their parents) need to hear that simply being able to get through a piece does not demonstrate real progress—and that instead this should be regarded the very beginning stage of learning a piece of music. Clearly defined performance goals for each piece helps keep the focus on the student's developmental priorities and the needs of the music. When a student is asked "What are you working on?" the name of a piece needn't always be the default response. Keep the focus on their fundamental skills by encouraging them to answer more specifically "Intonation!" or "Tone!"

toward that goal. It can then be your students' responsibility to chart their own improvement, keeping you informed of each week's progress.

> Consider This
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> Create a "Glossary of Practice Techniques" as a part of your standard teaching materials, using the ideas, processes, and practice techniques you listed from the "Personal Inventory" sections in Chapter 4, *Practicing*. If you teach a class of students, you could highlight one each week as a "Practice Technique of the Week": demonstrate how it is used, include it on their practice chart, and at the end of the week have them discuss in class how it helped their work.

> I was actually in graduate school before I clearly understood how to practice. Teachers would tell me to practice for three or four hours a day but I never had a systematic way to break down passages, a scale routine, or repertoire goals. My time in the practice room was often spent inefficiently—not because I didn't want to practice, but because I didn't know what to do for three hours other than repeat passages. If my earlier teachers had included practice skill as a teaching goal, I would have been much better prepared for my life-after-teachers.
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> DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

MUSIC LITERACY

Music literacy is one of the most important pathways to musical independence. To become capable, independent musicians, students must learn to read notes, decode meters and rhythms, understand key signatures, translate terminology, and decipher symbols that appear on the page. (See Chapter 7, *Sequencing*, to understand more about the best time and approach to introduce reading.) When students are entirely capable of learning and applying this information, continuing to say "It goes like this" is detrimental to your students' growth. So at the next lesson, when faced with the choice of teaching a student to count

> Consider This
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> Just as a parent runs alongside a child learning to ride a bike, so can the music teacher help a student gain confidence in reading music. Sight-read music together, and then gradually play softer and softer until the student is playing alone. Keep the pulse moving by jumping in when there are hesitations, acting as the "training wheels" for music reading, gradually allowing your student to develop momentum and balance toward independence.

and read notes, or falling back on rote learning to save time, remember that no shortcut to music reading will ever save time in the big picture, nor will it ever cultivate a thinking, independent musician.

Musical Decisions

> Having a teacher who asked me to repeat passages, listen for differences from one repetition to the next, and describe what I was experiencing made me realize that I was not only capable of fixing intonation and technical issues, but I was also competent to make musical decisions on my own.
>
> COLLEGE JUNIOR

Coaching students through the principles of musical choice can foster a sense of ownership of the music and inspire expressive musical performances. Letting students choose aspects of their musicianship creates a personal connection that is absolutely necessary for real musicality and expression to unfold.

Sometimes it is helpful for the teacher to demonstrate only two ways to play a phrase—a "musical way" as opposed to an "unmusical way"—since it's almost inevitable that the former will be selected as the "better" performance. When students can describe the differences between the two, and explain why one was preferable over the others, you will know they can recognize the rudimentary qualities of a musical performance.

However, making music is never quite as black and white as "the good way" and "the bad way," as the previous approach implies. Another drawback to this teaching method is that young musicians often feel compelled to copy the musical performance to be "correct" while not necessarily understanding or "feeling" it from the inside. Unless students understand the underlying concepts and expressive meaning that fostered the musical rendition, it is likely that they will continue to be dependent on demonstration and teacher directives to make their performances sound musical.

Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to invoke musical expression from students. Very young children are capable of highly expressive speech and inflection. If you listen to a five-year-old child describe something that is exciting, sad, or scary, you will begin to understand the range of their emotional understanding. Directing verbal expression toward musical possibilities is often a simple matter of expressing an emotion with the voice or with a gesture, identifying the characteristics, and then exploring ways to create that on the instrument. Allowing students to choose a mood

for a folk tune gives them ownership of their own expressive sensibilities, and even the most unusual choice will not matter, like a despondent *Baa Baa Black Sheep*. It is real music-making from inside the student, and the first step toward making important, independent musical choices.

> **Consider This**
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> There is always more than one way to musically play a piece or a phrase. Try demonstrating three or more possibilities for your student. Have a conversation about the differences, and whether one version seemed more appropriate than the others. You could also listen to recordings of great artists playing the same piece, comparing the interpretations, noting differences in tempo, dynamics, and phrasing. How does this approach contrast with the "musical/unmusical" method? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

The discussion in Chapter 1, *Musicianship*, guided you to define and explain many facets of musicianship from the music itself, including form, genre, composer and compositional period, and descriptive terminology. Virtually any of these concepts can be explored in an age-appropriate manner to offer insights into compositionally based interpretations. Introducing these musical concepts as early as possible teaches students that there is more to music-making than getting the notes right. When students are consistently encouraged to interpret clues in the music and combine them with personal expressiveness, they can perform with genuine musicianship. (A further discussion on this topic can be found in the next chapter, *Comprehensive Teaching*.)

Student-Centered Learning Activities

Students come to lessons to gain information from their teachers—that's the way it should be. However, this doesn't mean that the teacher should be an endless supply of definitions and answers to all questions. Teachers can guide students toward discovering answers for themselves. When a student doesn't know the meaning of a word in his music, is unfamiliar with a composer, or wants to learn more about his instrument, ask him to do a bit of research and tell you about it the next week. Students can also find works of art, architecture, literature—or better still, create their own—that represents to them the style, form, or meaning of the music they are working on. Simple score analysis, such as circling every occurrence of a repeated motif, or figuring out the major tonal centers, can be an easy way to introduce

approaches to dig deeper into a piece and understand more about music composition. Group lessons or studio classes can be a great time for your students to share the results of their independent work, take pride in some newfound expertise, and further reinforce learning.

Teachers tend to habitually make decisions about fingering, bowing, or breathing, leaving students out of the process, and perpetuating their need for "help" every time they get a new piece of music. Restrain your automatic impulse to do it all for them. Share your decision-making process out loud while you mark one section, and then allow the student to do the next section independently, either there at the lesson or as a home assignment. Follow up with a discussion about the choices the student made, where you agree, and why you might have chosen something else. As an extension of this assignment, consider sending a student home with a few lines of music to learn to the best of his or her ability. At the next lesson you can observe how well the student applies not just appropriate fingerings, bowings, or breathing, but overall accuracy with rhythms and notes, as well as dynamics, phrasing, stylistic choices, and so forth. This kind of assessment will give you an overview of how dependent your students might still be, and what areas should be targeted for more development.

Understanding Intonation

Individuality is often encouraged in areas such as musical interpretation, tempo, or phrasing—these are accepted and welcome as part of each musician's unique qualities. Intonation, however, is a component of music that has little room for variation and individuality. Faulty intonation can keep even the most expressive performance from ever being considered artistic. In other words, if the performance is out of tune, it doesn't matter whether it was fast and clean or the tone was beautiful—it won't be good until the intonation is fixed. In fact playing or singing in tune is so important that it trumps virtually all other aspects of technique. Therefore, when you think toward your students' musical life after they leave your studio, you will recognize that the time to teach the concept of "in tune" is right now and always.

In the beginning stages of instruction, the mechanics of just making sound on the instrument is all-consuming. At this stage, intonation problems are usually the result of students being overwhelmed with many other issues. Yet the teacher who optimistically thinks intonation will eventually get better on its own is probably mistaken. The key is making good intonation both understandable and important to students from the start.

Teachers cannot assume that all students start lessons with a clear concept of what is meant by "good intonation." (In fact, many students think the term *intonation* is another word for tone—so be sure to find out before spending a lot of time on it in a lesson.) While some students have little difficulty matching pitches, those who are challenged to play in tune on their instruments are likely to find singing in tune challenging as well. Instrumentalists produce pitch through a secondary source, but if their perception of pitch is external only, it is nearly impossible for them to recognize good intonation. Pitch must first be heard inside and then generated through the voice. Therefore it is necessary that all students be taught listening skills and basic vocal control.

Instrumental students are of the reluctant to sing in lessons (they didn't sign up for voice lessons, after all), so to ease the way forward, the teacher should sing first. Start by singing two different pitches, and have student tell you which is higher and which is lower. Then reverse roles and ask him to sing high and low pitches for you to identify. If the student's voice seems stuck on one note, "siren" your voices together to expand his vocal range and develop the flexibility needed to change pitches. Singing simple songs together is a fun way to encourage younger students to use their voices: give them a starting pitch that is in an easy range for them, and encourage them to correct pitches if they stray.

Actual intonation work can begin by asking a student to sing any pitch and then matching her pitch with your voice. Bend your intonation in different directions and then return to the unison pitch. Change roles and ask her to try to adjust her voice to yours. Next, ask her to play a pitch on her instrument; again you match your pitch to hers, both with your voice and with your instrument; then reverse roles again. Insist on the student matching with exactly the same note—don't settle for a close approximation. Anything less than an exact match is problematic because (1) you won't be able to assess whether the student understands the concept of intonation, and (2) you've taught the student that close is good enough.

It might take weeks to establish the ability to match pitches, but your persistence will pay off. Once students can

Consider This

When developing your students' independent sense of intonation, be careful not to respond too quickly to a well-tuned pitch. You might recognize the good intonation first, but you don't want to train students to wait for a positive reaction from you to know they are in tune. Wait patiently for that important moment when they recognize for themselves that a note is indeed in tune—then you can enthusiastically agree.

match unison pitches and adjust with relative ease, you can begin tuning intervals, starting with unisons, octaves, fifths, and fourths. Teach them to recognize the characteristic sound of a perfect interval: even a rough sketch will give them a picture of how sine waves can align and vibrate together. Nonperfect intervals and more dissonant intervals can follow, but at this point you will have established the fundamentals necessary for students to understand and make good choices about their intonation.

> Consider This
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> When increasing younger students' awareness of intonation, you might want to use a strobe tuner to show students how pitch adjustment "works." With the goal of moving the strobe, students very naturally make adjustments such as finger movement or embouchure change without detailed instructions. Once they have had the experience of moving the strobe, you can explain what they did to bend the pitch. Emphasize that placing a certain finger on a fingerboard, depressing the correct valve, or finding a position for the trombone slide creates the possibility for good intonation, but is only the first step toward playing in tune.

Unfortunately, knowing how to play in tune does not always mean that students will. They often need to be taught how to keep an ongoing connection between their inner voice and the pitches they produce. To check for that connection, ask a student to perform a short passage very slowly (without tempo), playing only the pitches the inner voice is singing. If every note is in tune (or adjusted to the correct pitch) you know that the student understands the concept and simply needs to make intonation more of a priority. Teach students a variety of ways to practice intonation, and give them assignments that focus specifically on intonation practice: playing against a drone, recording themselves, reinforcing muscle memory for accurate measurements between notes, testing pitches to harmonics, and so forth.

> Consider This
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> Students need to know how to tune their instruments, so don't always do it for them in lessons. Show students several approaches to tuning that are appropriate for their instrument: using an electronic tuner or strobe; referencing a tuning fork, piano, or other instrument; comparing harmonics and overtones. Teach them to listen for "beats" and how to make them disappear while drawing their attention to the resonance of good intonation.

Performance Preparation

Performing is the ultimate independent experience. Whether anyone likes it or not, students are completely on their own during performance, and teachers are powerless to help them. Everything we've done to foster their independence as musicians will be evident in their ability to perform well: from their confident walk out on stage, to the well-executed and expressive performance, to their graceful bow and exit. While it is the teacher's job to be sure all these performance skills are fully prepared in advance, they will be most reliable and meaningful when students have a sense of ownership about each and every aspect.

SUCCESS TAKES PRACTICE

Performing, just like every other skill, takes practice. Yet students who study classical music typically do not perform more than a few times a year, due to the fact that preparation of a new piece often takes months. This is not usually enough to increase students' sense of comfort in front of an audience. Remember, however, that the music to be performed needn't always be the latest addition to their repertoire. Have younger students "recycle" previously prepared pieces in frequent, low-profile situations, such as group lessons and in-house concerts for friends and family. A similar strategy can be used for music majors as well, since the infrequency of formal recitals does not necessarily promote a relaxed, comfortable approach to performance. Scheduling more performances than required allows students to experience success and ease, especially when performing the same repertoire in multiple recitals, in multiple venues, for multiple audiences. Similar to the way concert artists schedule several recitals of the same program, this performance approach can be a pathway to developing confidence and reliability.

MINDSET AND FOCUS

Even with the most thorough preparation, high-profile performances can create anxiety. You can help students direct their focus away from the fearful aspects and toward their musical and technical plan. During a lesson, encourage them to "talk" themselves through a performance as if they were a coach watching from the sidelines: "Relax shoulders before the forte." "Light, free sixteenth notes." "Vibrate before the shift." By verbalizing their thought processes, they cultivate the habit of directing themselves toward their best playing, while giving you a window on how they are mentally preparing for each technical and musical moment. (See Chapter 5, *Performing*, for a discussion about performance plans.) To reinforce these self-directed thoughts, place sticky-notes on their music and give them an assignment to

make notes of those performance goals and directives that help them the most during the week's practice. With some trial and error, a list of the primary technical goals and musical qualities will evolve. The final version of this list can be left on the music for the rest of the preparation, and reread just before a performance to help students keep their focus under pressure.

Relying on inspiration during a performance to deliver a potentially special or powerful moment leaves room for disappointment. To increase the odds that your students' thoughts and technique will reliably deliver their musical message, help them decide in advance what effect they want to convey, for example, suspense, longing, or despair, and translate that into the technical requirements to make it happen. While focusing on the "how-to" aspects of musical effects might seem overly calculated to some students, such a well-planned approach readily emerges as a spontaneous musical gesture in performance.

> **Consider This**
> A student's self-evaluation immediately after a run-through or performance is extremely valuable, maybe even more valuable than the teacher's feedback. Review a recording of the performance with the student and help her form constructive critiques rather than making comments like "That part was bad." Encourage a more objective assessment of why a section didn't work, and how it could be improved.

OTHER PERFORMANCE-RELATED ISSUES

Stopping due to a technical or memory issue is a common fear associated with performance. When practicing, students get in the habit of stopping during certain passages or slowing down an entire section because of a technical challenge. Teachers can help by insisting that they "play through" many times before the actual performance. Show them how to use pre-performance mistakes as opportunities to learn how to recover quickly. If the student is tempted to stop anyway, use the metronome as a tool for the technique of grabbing the next beat rather than lingering to try to fix a problem. Introductions, extended tutti sections, and even a few bars of rests can cause a flow problem when the student is not in the habit of counting through these sections. Play the piano accompaniment or orchestral introductions and interludes for your students often, either on a keyboard or on your own instrument. Ask students to sing interludes or other parts that fit with their passages until they are fully aware of the bigger picture.

Less experienced students should be encouraged to verbalize any concerns and expectations about a performance, which could potentially cause problems if left

unaddressed. General anxiety about "messing up" can be answered by reminding students about how well-prepared they are and how their performance plan will carry them through. Discussing a worst case scenario and how to deal with it if did happen can dissipate distracting fears. In addition, "I want to play better than . . ." comparisons are unhelpful, and students must recognize that they have no control over how someone else might play. They do, however, have full control of their own best playing, and this of course is where their focus needs to be. These conversations can help center students and remind them that they have the power to do what needs to be done; in other words, to take independent responsibility for their performance.

> Consider This
>
> When students' auditions require concertos and orchestral excerpts, the importance of inner hearing is particularly important. Be sure students listen to recordings of the full orchestration to be intimately acquainted with how their part fits with the full score. Just like any professional audition, the performance should be nuanced so as to make it obvious to the audition panel that the musician hears and understands his or her part in the bigger picture.

PERFORMANCE TIMELINES

Advanced high school and college students need to learn the importance of advanced preparation before a major event like an audition or recital. Marking the date on a calendar and creating a practice plan leading up to it helps students to see what their responsibility is in the process. Create a plan that reflects an intelligent timeline in preparing major performances, and include scheduled recording sessions and informal performances for self-review. This increases the intensity well ahead of the actual performance, and helps unseasoned performers adjust to the experience. Put the responsibility of preparation in their hands by offering books that support their efforts. Once students have had success with such thorough preparation—perhaps in contrast with an unfortunate experience of an ill-prepared performance—they learn to take more responsibility in the future.

> Consider This
>
> What would be the benefits of a student performing the same piece on every required jury and degree recital throughout his or her academic career? Even as a hypothetical construct, what evidence of growth and independence could be revealed through this process?

Independent Repertoire Development

One of the major benefits to your students in becoming musically literate is the ability to choose and learn music independently. As students mature, they should be encouraged to choose and prepare some music on their own. While similar to an assignment suggested earlier, this is yet another step in the direction of full independence. If you want to set some reasonable limits, you might want to offer an anthology of pieces that are at their skill level, knowing that any choice is a safe one. Beyond that, however, set them free to learn as much of the piece as possible. These independent learning assignments encourage students to apply what they have learned rather than "waiting to be told," which, to be fair to students, has most probably been the primary experience imposed on them by many teachers. Here you are asking them to apply everything they know—so give them credit for what they can do initially, and perhaps send them home with a checklist of other elements you know they can figure out for themselves.

As students advance, they will be faced with learning more difficult music, such as orchestral excerpts or major concerti. To develop their independent efforts, students need to learn how to approach music at this level step by step. A checklist like this one can help guide a student's week-to-week development of a piece with minimal input from you.

- Listen to multiple recordings of the piece.
- Consider stylistic and interpretive ideas from different artists' interpretations.
- Identify the most challenging technical requirements of the piece; identify passages that might need to be learned one component at a time.
- Identify aspects of the piece that transfer previously learned skills, or if a new skill is needed, begin creating an etude to develop that technique.

Using your ideas as prompts, encourage your students to think of their own ways to break down difficult passages, increase speed, shape phrases, and present musical ideas. Not all the strategies mentioned above will apply to every piece, but by offering a toolbox of ideas you can encourage the student's ability to independently decipher a score, design a practice plan, and establish his own artistic performance standard.

Independence through Experience

Sequencing repertoire and developing technique are much more obvious teaching responsibilities than considering experiences that help prepare student for the day

when he or she will no longer be a student. It would be just as impossible to write a "one size fits all" prescription for raising an independent and responsible musician as for raising a child to become an independent and responsible adult. However, if you are a teacher of a more mature student, it is important to consider which experiences could effect a positive transition from your studio to an independent life in music.

MUSICAL FLEXIBILITY

An important aspect of becoming an independent musician is developing the ability to be flexible in a myriad of performing situations. Playing or singing in different styles, reading different clefs, transposing into different octaves and keys, being able to follow or lead, improvising a simple cadence—all add to students' confidence about performing in any situation, and go a long way toward a sense of being "comfortable in one's musical skin."

Independent musicians must have command of their own performing while staying aware of the music around them. When listening skills and musical understanding merge, performers develop a musical intelligence that allows them to automatically adjust in unpredictable situations. For example, when a soloist skips a measure and a ninety-member orchestra makes the adjustment in two beats, that's musical intelligence in action. Flexible performers can make decisions that allow them to collaborate successfully with other musicians at all ability levels. They know when to play and when not to play, where to play, and when to take things down an octave, create an obbligato line, or improvise a cadence. You can test your students' knowledge and decision-making ability by simulating group situations in which they will have to make quick adjustments in order to make musical sense in the moment.

Most working musicians today must also be able to function in many different musical styles and situations. To expand your students' musical experiences, you might need to expand your own knowledge of other types of music, including world music, improvisation, and contemporary styles. Being open-minded for the purpose of increasing your student's musical flexibility doesn't mean you are not committed to developing fine classical musicians or are negligent in regard to standards. On the contrary, it means that you are committed to your students' ability to bring excellence to any style or situation in which they perform.

IDENTIFYING ARTISTRY

To become independent artists, students need to identify and understand components of artistry. There are identifiable behaviors and characteristics that cause us to be inspired by some performances and not others. A performance your students may

describe as "awesome" is so for many reasons, but identifying and describing the components of artistry might be an ability they have not yet cultivated.

Virtually any artistic component can be analyzed and taught. You might want to consider organizing your class around listening to a wonderful recording of a piece (or perhaps two or three of the same piece). Create a discussion related to what students hear by posing intriguing questions. (See Chapter 1, *Musicianship*, for ideas.) Interject your own comments as little as possible while you let your students wrestle with what makes a performance artistic and meaningful.

Developing Professionalism

With skill development and confidence come special opportunities and professional prospects for your students. As their teacher; it is your responsibility to instill a level of professionalism that will earn them respect and acceptance in the world of working musicians.

> **Personal Inventory:** How did you learn professional standards of behavior? How did you learn the importance of being responsible, respectful, and disciplined? Do you wish you had been given more guidance on these matters? If so, what information would have been most helpful?

MASTER CLASS PERFORMANCES

A master class performance is different from a concert performance in that it includes both a performance and a lesson component. Even if a student is comfortable in a performance situation, it is another skill altogether to be in a public setting making changes to the requests of an unfamiliar teacher. Preparing your students for this experience goes beyond helping them to learn the music. A studio class that mimics a master class situation can be a useful part of this process. Whether you are arranging a mock master class or helping a student prepare for the real thing, here are some points you may want to share:

- The master class teacher might respond to a student's performance with suggestions that conflict with your instruction or that are difficult to incorporate in the moment. The most important role of the student is to be receptive and respectfully "give it his all."

- The guest teacher may have a very different personality or unfamiliar teaching style. Again, teach your students to be accepting, be adaptable, and do their best to follow directions.
- Students should never challenge or refute the opinion of the teacher in this setting unless they are asked to state their own opinions.
- Students should feel confident to ask for clarification of verbal instructions or demonstrations.
- Students should memorize the repertoire if expected, and bring a copy of the music in case the master class teacher wants to reference the score.
- Students should be reminded that besides their musical performance, others also notice their receptivity, flexibility, poise, and politeness.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ENSEMBLE MEMBERSHIP

Many of your students will participate in ensemble situations outside their school and studio settings. By assisting students with their music preparation and attending these events whenever possible, you demonstrate to your students that you value their participation in ensembles. Students about to embark on independent careers in music need to understand their viability as working musicians will be based as much on their dependability and professionalism as their performing skills. If possible, take them with you to a rehearsal, recording session, or performance so they can see how you work in a professional situation beyond the teaching studio. This gives students the opportunity to ask you questions about the professional world and gives you the opportunity to share insights and advice that might not otherwise be discussed, such as how important it is to

- Respond to job invitations in a timely manner.
- Learn parts well before the first rehearsal.
- Arrive early, and warm up appropriately for all rehearsals and performances.
- Bring what you need to the job: music, pencils, mutes, endpin stops, extra reeds, strings, drumsticks, and so forth—in other words, be prepared.
- Respect time limits on breaks.
- Observe requirements or requests related to dress.
- Demonstrate respect for conductors, contractors, and other musicians.
- Remember that as a professional your attitude and actions speak louder than your words.

As students mature, the line between "words of wisdom" and "parental nagging" becomes obscured but remind students that you are giving them sage advice because

you know they are ready for bigger things, and even one important tip could save them a job or their reputation some day.

The best teaching creates a balance between offering information and encouraging self-reliance in students. Ultimately, all artistry and career decisions will be entirely their own, but if along the way we have offered as many opportunities as possible for them to think for themselves, solve problems, and make connections, they should be fully ready for independence. When we teach well, our students become successful and we become obsolete—a most honorable way to lose a very fulfilling job.

Ideas for Further Exploration

1. Refer to your notes from Chapter 5, *Performing*. Create a short list of approaches that would help a middle school student prepare for a performance. Turn this list into practice assignments that could be utilized over the course of a few weeks.
2. Review the list below and make notes related to each of your students' strengths and deficits. Use this information to pinpoint aspects of student independence that you may need to address in your teaching.

THE TEACHER'S INDEPENDENT MUSICIAN TRAINING CHECKLIST

My students typically . . .

____ tune their own instrument
____ learn and perform music independently on some level
____ recognize incorrect notes or rhythms during performance
____ maintain a relaxed postural relationship with the instrument in practice and performance
____ demonstrate the mechanics of beautiful tone production
____ adjust tone quality during performance
____ sight-read music appropriate to their level of development
____ sing accompaniment interludes in solos and excerpts
____ control and vary dynamics
____ readily adjust to changes of fingerings, bowings, breath markings, and articulations
____ discuss music in an intelligent manner, using appropriate descriptions and correct terminology
____ translate lesson directives into a logical practice plan

____ demonstrate flexibility by performing the same piece of music in different styles
____ break down difficult passages of music into manageable practice increments
____ perform memorized repertoire on a regular basis
____ demonstrate appropriate stage presence
____ accept critique and direction related to their performance

Recommended Reading

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