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1 Musicianship

THE FINAL CHORD lingers over spellbound silence. Warm, appreciative applause slowly swells and fills the hall. A few hoarse shouts of "Bravo!" ring out as some audience members rise to their feet and others wipe away involuntary tears. The artists reappear on the stage for another bow, and ultimately everyone is standing. As the sustained ovation brings the musicians back for a third time, one musician puts a hand to his heart in gratitude, the other smiles warmly, making eye contact with audience members in each section of the hall. As the applause subsides, the crowd files out almost reluctantly, not wanting to disrupt the connection they feel with the music, the musicians, even one another.

What just happened? The concert every musician wishes to perform, yes—but how and why did this happen? Why was the audience so responsive? What was the connection between the musicians and the audience that made this kind of event possible? Was it sheer technical brilliance, or something more?

Exploring, Defining, and Communicating Musicality

Refined technical ability can certainly be inspiring, and musicians spend countless hours practicing to perfect their technique. On the other hand, we are musicians,

not technicians, and the most revered artists in our field are rarely lauded only for their technical accomplishments. We know what expressive playing is, because we hear it every day from concert artists, our colleagues, and our teachers, and we demand it of ourselves. We can easily identify a truly musical performance over one that is not—even choose the "better" of two musical performances. So what does this "musician" title actually mean? Beyond the obvious ability to play an instrument or sing, is it possible to explain in words what makes a performer or a performance "musical"?

Personal Inventory: Before reading on, think for a few minutes about how you would define musical playing, and jot down a few ideas. You might want to first consider what is unmusical—and then change it to a positive statement. Consolidate your ideas into a single sentence.

It's a real challenge to create any kind of definition of musical playing—let alone a precise one—not only because musicianship has many components but also because it is difficult to put into words something that is communicated primarily *without* words. Yet a large part of what musicians do when they teach or practice is to communicate with students or themselves about areas of their playing they seek to improve and refine. Technique is easy to talk about because there is a vast and workable vocabulary that is regularly used to describe technical issues: "The sixteenth note passage is uneven because the fingers aren't lifting at a consistent height over the keys," or "The bow needs to be placed farther outside the balance point for a freer bounce." But how do musicians communicate what is needed to improve in the area of musical performance? If a teacher says to a student, "You need to play more musically," it's probably true, but such a statement does not offer any specific direction as to how the student might make changes for the better. To be effective, musical directives are typically framed in more practical language, such as "The subito forte needs to be more dramatic" or "Find a way to pace the ritard more naturally." "That phrase isn't going anywhere—can you shape it more meaningfully?" or "Make a different sound in the minor section."

These directives would be specific to a particular piece and a particular performer, and therefore too limited to define musicality, but they do infer broader categories of musicianship, such as these:

- The ability to perform with a variety of dynamics, articulations, and tone colors

- A well-developed sense of timing, pacing, and tempo
- The ability to connect a group of notes into a single, unified shape that completes a musical idea
- The ability to respond to changes in harmonies and other compositional elements in a meaningful way

These are important aspects of musical performance, and a student would need to examine, refine, and nurture these concepts over many years in order to establish mature musicianship. Still, these thoughts are limited in scope because each identifies only one specific component of musicianship. A musical performance has many levels of complexity and interacting components. Consider the following definitions of musicianship:

- The unification of musical expression and technical skill so that the technique disappears and the listener is only aware of the meaning and beauty of the music
- The integration of well-developed instrumental technique with music history and theory in order to create a performance that is stylistically appropriate to the period, the composer, and the genre
- The ability to "speak" to an audience with music-making, to "connect" with them, or to "tell a story" with a piece of music.

These definitions take into account some important interactions: between the physical realm and the art, between various aspects of musical language, and between the performer and the listener. While these statements describe more of what musicians actually do when they perform, it remains virtually impossible to capture the full meaning of musical performance in a single statement. In fact, the broader the statement, the more difficult it is to determine how such a thing could be accomplished.

> Music is an outburst of the soul.
>
> FREDERICK DELIUS

> The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes—ah, that is where the art resides!
>
> ARTUR SCHNABEL

> Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.
>
> CHARLIE PARKER

> The art of interpretation is not to play what is written.
>
> PABLO CASALS

> To study music, we must learn the rules. To create music, we must break them.
>
> NADIA BOULANGER

> Simplicity is the final achievement. After one has played a vast quantity of notes and more notes, it is simplicity that emerges as the crowning reward of art.
>
> FREDERIC CHOPIN

Consider This

Reflect on these statements of well-known artists, as well as others you have heard. What "big picture" element of musicality is implied in each statement? What would a musician actually be doing in performance to manifest the concept inherent in each of these statements?

Such definitions are thought-provoking, perhaps even profound, but none of them gives us a complete picture of musicianship. Even more to the point, these broader statements presume that the performer has already mastered a full vocabulary of musical elements, and it is not likely that anyone could learn to play expressively if suggestions like these were the only guidance offered.

> The whole problem can be stated quite simply by asking, "Is there a meaning to music?" My answer would be, "Yes." And "Can you state in so many words what the meaning is?" My answer to that would be, "No."
>
> AARON COPLAND

Can Musicality Be Learned?

The teacher listens to his violin student play through her piece. The rhythm is correct, the notes are mostly in tune, and her tone is decent—but the performance is so mechanical that the teacher interrupts. "I'm sorry, but I had to stop you. First of all, you need to vibrate every note, not just one every now and then. Also, this melody needs to be forte when we first hear it—but when it is repeated in the minor you need to play much softer." The teacher circles the dynamic markings in the music. "This fermata needs to be held much longer before you go on. Save your bow, OK? Start again, please." The student begins again, and wanting to please her teacher, she vibrates every note, plays the dynamics as she was told, and holds out the note at the fermata as long as she can before going on. "The vibrato is better, and I could hear your piano that time, but the fermata is too long now," says the teacher. "Something in between would work better." So the student plays again, and the fermata errs on the short side again, but it's longer than the first

time. The lesson is almost over, so these fixes will have to suffice for now. "OK, that's better," the teacher says, and offers a smile of encouragement, but inside he wonders how it's possible for someone to do all the right things and still sound so unmusical. Perhaps, he muses, she just doesn't "have it."

Have you ever been in this teacher's place? Was this student ever you? This lesson had some ingredients of musical instruction. Each of the teacher's suggestions were aimed at fostering good musicianship in order to help the student produce a more musical-sounding performance—and with limited success, it worked. The unfortunate truth is that it is quite possible for a musician to play with great dynamic contrast, use vibrato, and sustain a long fermata yet still sound unmusical. The problem in the scenario is that the technical directives alone simply did not connect the student to any expressive meaning. Technique only allows the *possibility* of a musical performance. Without an expressive purpose, a technical approach to teaching musicality can result in dutifully executed but inexpressive performances.

Most music students are taught technique before musicianship so that the skills are well-established when it is time to create a musical sound on an instrument. These skills can be as basic as increasing the height of drumsticks for a crescendo or varying the speed and width of vibrato to change the intensity of sound. When a phrase demands more expressivity, musicians—even ones with apparent innate musicality—are frequently coached via their technique in order to access more musical playing. Certainly one must know about breath support or arm weight to help create dynamic contrast, how to produce a good vibrato, and what a fermata is and how to sustain a sound. But technique cannot be the sole pathway to expressive performing. Musical comprehension—the *reason* a musician would play with contrast, use vibrato, or hold a fermata so that it "feels right"—has to be part of the equation. Consider now some expressive approaches that might help nurture the musicianship of a student with similar issues:

TECHNICAL DIRECTIVE: Play (or sing) loud there, then very soft here.

MUSICAL EXPLORATION: How does the minor version of the melody feel different from the major one? Can you feel that emotional experience in your body? How does that mood swing alter the tone of your voice? Does the change happen immediately or is there a pause or hesitation?

TECHNICAL DIRECTIVE: Use vibrato on every note.

MUSICAL EXPLORATION: What is the music trying to express . . . passion, warmth, joy, excitement? What does that sound like in your voice? When the phrase reaches its peak should the vibrato sound different? What about the minor phrase? Can the kind of vibrato you use be an extension of how your body feels?

TECHNICAL DIRECTIVE: Wait longer at the fermata.

MUSICAL EXPLORATION: How much time would it take for normal life to resume after a dramatic event? Or the dust to settle after a sack of flour has been dropped? Or consider how long it takes for a ball to come back to you after you've thrown it into the air?

The question "why" lies behind these musical explorations. The answers supply a musician at any stage of development with a reason to further refine technique. Most important, however, such explorations open two significant pathways to musical expression: (1) they help a performer become more aware of the connection between written music and personal expression, and (2) they reveal the possibility of many ways to play musically.

Consider This

There is an adage about being musically talented: that people "either have it or they don't." Of course there will be prodigies who exude innate musicality from the moment they begin, others who learn only with great effort, and everyone in between. But does this mean that someone who is initially challenged to play or sing musically cannot become an expressive musician?

Perhaps the students who seem to have innate musical sensibilities are like children learning their native language, having heard it all their lives. The most vital and basic communication comes first: the sounds and articulations of the language are cultivated, the meaning of words and phrases are experienced. All this happens without formal lessons, and long before rules of grammar and intellectualized definitions are ever imposed. Compare that to the way most people learn a second language: in a class, where vocabulary and pronunciations are learned, followed by sentence structure and grammar; combinations and variations are explored; and more sophisticated vocabulary, inflections, and nuances are developed and integrated over time. When students can barely pronounce the new words they're learning, it's a lot to expect that they can immediately speak with meaningful inflection. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the second language cannot develop into a deeply expressive form of communication. The ability to express emotions, needs, and desires are at the core of every human being, but learning to express those through a secondary form of communication—especially when it involves an unfamiliar object like an instrument—takes time to develop.

Musicianship Based on Musical Knowledge

There is still more to musical performance than personal expression and effective technique. The vast body of knowledge pertaining to music has a substantial influence on musical interpretation. This information is gradually acquired as you learn your instrument and the repertoire, but some of it is learned primarily through special classes in music theory, history, and performance practice. When deliberate connections are not drawn between the information and how it affects performance, this knowledge seems irrelevant to becoming a performing musician. It can take years, perhaps decades, for musicians to become fully aware of the relationships between performing and what they learned in music history and music theory. In the interim, that information tends to lie dormant, but it still serves as an unconscious component in effective musical performance.

> **Personal Inventory:** Before you read further, take ten minutes to list as many aspects of music history, composers, theory, and composition that help to inform your musicianship, leaving a few lines between each. Then go back through the list and ask "Why?" and "How?" questions of each—as in "Why does this matter?" or "How does this influence the way I play?"—and write your answers beside each component on your list.

Your list is probably quite long, even if you didn't take the time to detail each aspect fully. The point is that you know a tremendous amount about music, and readily utilize much of that knowledge when performing. In fact, some of this information may be so well integrated into your musical sensibilities that you aren't consciously aware of it. For instance, you immediately change your stylistic approach when switching from a piece by Mozart to one by Tchaikovsky, even when sight-reading; and despite a forte dynamic marking in either score, you know not to play or sing louder than your colleague who has the melody. Such musical responsiveness might seem too obvious to consider, but the more you are aware of your well-conditioned choices, the more intentional your musicianship can be, and the better prepared you will be to guide students.

Understanding the Context and Language of Music

When preparing for a performance, artist-level musicians learn background information about the composer and study the compositional details that make the work

a masterpiece. This comprehensive preparation is essential to making a performance as meaningful and artful as the piece was intended.

THE COMPOSER'S LIFE AND TIMES

While it is possible to perform music without knowing the context from which it came, any interpretation of a composition is more meaningful when the musical understanding includes factors related to the composer's personal, social or political circumstances, as well as an awareness of the compositional style and performance practice of the day.

Background information. Knowledge of a composer and the history of his or her composition can offer valuable insights for interpretation. This essential background information is likely to include the age and experience of the composer (often gleaned via a publishing or cataloguing number) and specific life events or occasions that inspired the work. Beyond this, it's important to remember that composers did not live in isolation: they were influenced by teachers, social status, employment, health, politics, and personal relationships, just as people are today. Learning about these influences can offer unexpected insights for interpreting a composer's music. While much can be learned from historical and analytical publications, anything written by a composer him- or herself, especially articles and letters, can help the performer feel significantly more connected to the composer and the composition.

Attributes of compositional periods and performance practice. Whether a composer utilized previously established traditions or broke new stylistic ground, understanding the compositional techniques of the period give context to an interpretation. It is also important to learn how the instruments of the time were different from modern instruments: how they were made, what materials were used, tuning differences, and so forth. Typical performance venues of the day, whether outdoors, at a church, in a small chamber, or at a palace, can offer clues to sounds and techniques that are closer to the composer's original intentions. Musicians make choices about to what degree these factors influence their performances: substantially, so as to be as true as possible to the sounds that may have been heard in the earliest performances, or subtly, with the assumption that the composer would be glad for modern changes in instruments, tuning, and acoustical settings.

COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS

Before the twentieth century, the only way composers could make their creations permanent and available to all was to put ink marks on a page. Even with modern recording equipment and computerized notation programs, the manuscript is still a

crucial part of the art of composition, and the study of a composer's score is essential to a meaningful interpretation. Performing musicians are trained to understand this rich and complex language; they also learn unwritten rules of interpretation: some that apply to Western music in general, others that are specific to eras of composition, and still more that are idiomatic to certain composers.

The following are some of the compositional elements that influence musical choices. While some might seem almost too obvious to mention, try to imagine how a performance would sound if a musician lacked such understanding. This is how great teachers pinpoint important teaching elements and work to heighten their students' musical expression, and how great performers are able to demonstrate such command of their musicianship.

Genre. The kind of piece being performed influences the stylistic approach, whether it be a solo suite; solo piece with accompaniment; sonata, trio, quartet, or other chamber music combinations; or concerto. The musician's role in the context of the piece also influences interpretation: as part of a section in an orchestra, as a soloist in a concerto or opera, as an equal partner in a sonata, or as the continuo underpinning in a Baroque composition. Songs, dances, and marches—whether labeled as such in the music or interpreted as such by the performer—all require different stylistic and articulation approaches.

Form. While trained musicians might easily take this aspect for granted, forms such as rondo, ternary, minuet and trio—even through-composed forms—have a distinct feel to the performer and influence many choices made in timing, tempos, dynamics, color changes, and so forth.

> Consider This
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> Think about how you perform a piece in sonata form: the different musical responses you have, whether finishing the exposition to repeat it or moving on to the development; how it feels to arrive at the recapitulation; the sounds you would use as you enter the coda section, feeling the momentum or repose that completes a musical journey. How would your musical interpretation be affected if this understanding was not in place?

Meter, tempo, rhythm, and timing. When a musical performance is described as having "the right feel," it can likely be attributed to the interpretation of tempo, rhythm, and timing. This area of musicianship is much easier to identify when it is *not* working rather than when it is, from infractions of the most basic rules to a subtle faux pas of interpretation. The fundamental premise is that all notes are given full duration and space—whether subdividing the long ones or not compressing the short ones. Certain musical conventions help us recognize and interpret various

components of meter and rhythm—such as understanding the difference in rhythmic groupings between 3/4 and 6/8 meters, or knowing to identify and draw attention to a hemiola in a composition by Handel or Brahms. Conventions are much less useful when determining how long to hold a fermata or how much rubato is enough. Musicians must take into account that rhythms (as well as many other aspects of written music) are really only a reasonable approximation of any composers' initial inspiration. It would be a mistake to consider all rhythms and tempi to be as absolute as they appear on the page (for instance, dotted rhythms in Baroque music, the early placement of the second pulse in a Viennese waltz, or eighth notes that are "swung"), so the reinterpretation of such notation is essential to a meaningful performance.

Melody. This is probably the most recognized element of music, and the one most taken for granted by the casual listener. Yet of all the components of music, shaping a melodic phrase is perhaps the most demanding skill required of any musician. Furthermore, as challenging as it is to play a perfectly phrased melody, it is even more difficult to describe in words how it's done. However there are certain factors that influence musical phrasing, even if they are infrequently verbalized. Here are a few commonly accepted guidelines.

Parameters for Shaping a Musical Phrase

- All melodies have a beginning note, an arrival note, and an ending note—all other notes serve to move the music toward or away from those notes, with the possible exceptions of a secondary arrival or deceptive ending.
- Dynamics and timing are used to enhance the contour and direction of a phrase, whether or not notated by the composer.
- Notes of shorter rhythmic value usually move toward longer notes.
- Large leaps are often more expressive than stepwise movement; chromatic notes often serve to create expressive harmonic tension, delay an arrival note, or both.
- Tension and release in a melody is usually supported by the harmonies, so it is always advisable to work on phrasing with an awareness of the harmonic underpinnings.

A performance lacking in just one of these parameters could be noticeably less expressive. While this list is hardly complete, these ideas at least begin to define the basis for creating a well-shaped melody.

Articulations. Slurs, dots, and lines over notes are indications from the composer (or sometimes an editor) of length, shape, connection, and stress, but they are only the beginning of interpreting a piece. Since the symbols are limited but the variety of

sounds are not, legato, portato, brushed or pointed staccato must be considered through the conventions of compositional periods or the composers themselves, and of course through the implicit meaning of the music.

Tonality and harmony. Knowing key signatures and chords is a significant step toward understanding how the harmonic structure of a piece helps us interpret music, but it's really just the beginning. Composers often use tonalities to give their pieces structural and emotional arch, in a sense like a very large-scale melody, and use "false" tonal centers to fool or surprise the listener. Musicians learn that key signatures can also be significant to interpreting the music, as some composers heard particular characteristics in tonalities, like Beethoven's "heroic" key of E-flat major. Modalities of all kinds, including blues and pentatonic scales, color the expression of a composition. Chord progressions within keys also create varying degrees of tension, resolution, or surprise, and the frequency of chord changes, otherwise known as harmonic rhythm can affect the sense of pacing, whether or not the actual tempo is altered.

Terminology. Expressive terms and directives in the music offer important clues toward discovering the mood, feeling, and spirit of a composition. Some of a performer's most creative explorations emerge from a dedication to realizing those expressive markings—through the voice, the instrument, or the baton.

Consider This

What other ways do tonality and harmony influence musical interpretation? Consider chord inversions, altered chords, and suspensions, among other possibilities. How should the historical period of the composition be a factor when interpreting harmonies for performance?

Dynamics and accents. Dynamics are the volume indicators of music, but without understanding the range of contexts and expressive possibilities that exist, dynamic changes can be as dispassionate as changing the volume on a machine. To a mature musician, dynamic markings and accents say at least as much about quality as quantity. For instance, a forte is not just loud—questions must be asked: Why is it the music forte? Is this the predominant voice, or are all the parts equally loud? Is the forte the culmination of a crescendo or the beginning of a new section? Is it powerful? Expansive? Robust? Angry? Warm?

Other Compositional Elements. Instrumentation, ornamentation, counterpoint, ostinato, motifs, fugue subjects, and appoggiaturas: such a list could continue to grow almost indefinitely. There's not really any more need here to speculate about the specific effects each element can have on a musician's interpretation. While some influence an interpretation more than others, each needs to be considered as a

potentially meaningful part of musical performance. These essential components of musical understanding can be viewed in two ways:

1. The lack of awareness or understanding of an essential compositional element can cause a performer to play unmusically, or cause a piece to sound uninteresting. Imagine performing Vivaldi without understanding a sequence, or Beethoven's Fifth Symphony without knowing about rhythmic motifs, or Bach without understanding the concept of a bass line.

2. The better musicians are at identifying significant compositional elements of a piece, the better they are able to enhance the music's substance and meaning, and highlight its unique character in performance. Digging deeply and taking nothing for granted is the performer's imperative.

Exploring Expressive Musical Performance through the Human Experience

While understanding compositional devices gives musicians a substantial basis for meaningful interpretation, a performance would likely feel incomplete without the musician's ability to play the music with his or her own personal sense of expression. When it is said that a performer "plays with feeling," what are we talking about? Conveying emotion through musical sound is certainly part of it, but a performer's senses and life experiences also contribute to his or her sense of timing and responsiveness to the music: what one has experienced in nature, in relationships, through verbal expression, breathing, gestures, and so forth. Consciously or not, musicians draw on these experiences to help convey musical meaning.

Personal Inventory: Before reading further, list your five senses, and then consider descriptive words commonly used to elicit musical expression that fall under each of those sensory experiences.

SENSORY EXPERIENCES

Sight. Visual imagery is used constantly when describing music. Performers refer to quantity and quality of light, such as when they call sounds "bright" and "dark." These descriptors usually refer to the harmonies in the music or overtones in a sound. (The brighter the sound, the more upper overtones are audible.) The word "color" is often used, though not everyone envisions an actual color when using that term. Musicians do speak of sounds that are transparent or dense, up close or far away, and large or small, often in reference to dynamics. Shapes, such as rounded or angular,

are frequently used to describe articulations. The beauty of communicating about music through such familiar images is that visual references tend to be self-descriptive, so fewer words are needed to convey the meaning.

Images from nature can have a powerful effect on music-making. A pianist might envision a long, complex phrase as the contour of mountains on the horizon. The delicate perfection of a small flower might inspire a flautist to create a sound of similar exquisiteness. The vast power of a great landscape frees a baritone to produce his most open and powerful sound. A cellist searching for just the right tone quality for the coda of a Brahms sonata envisions the final glow of a sunset. While such imagery will not always provide the same inspiration to everyone, sharing potent images with students or colleagues can encourage them to discover their own personal connections. Therefore, even the most esoteric or obscure associations are more valuable shared than kept to one's self.

Touch. Smooth, silky, soft, furry, feathery, rough, coarse, are all tactile approaches to describing sounds in music. Musicians also use temperature as descriptors, such as "warm" or *con fuoco*. References to cooler or even frigid temperatures are less common but offer great possibilities for color and contrast. "Sharp," "rounded," or other shaped sounds, while discussed as a visual reference in the previous section, might offer some performers more to work with in the way of a physical, tactile approach.

Hearing. Music is an aural art, so comparisons to other sounds are the most obvious. Any variations of articulation, tone colors, intensity, volume, and sustain or decay can be used to imitate spoken or sung words, sounds in nature, or qualities of other instruments. Even the sounds of machines, like an approaching train, can be effective in evoking musical creativity.

> **Consider This**
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> Think of images and experiences that express cold, such as glassy ice, tree branches laden with snow, icicles slowly dripping, or shivering against the wind. Are there gestures and sounds inspired by these images that could be expressed in your music-making?

Taste. Musicians don't necessarily think about taste when they experience a sound, yet *dolce* is one of our most common markings in music. What does "sweet" sound like? What about "bitter"? Certainly some of the compositions of Dmitri Shostakovich invite an acerbic quality in the interpretation. *Secco* is another common interpretive marking, but what about its opposite, "juicy"? Considering the variety of flavors and even textures experienced by the palate, this is perhaps an under-employed inroad to describing music.

Smell. The olfactory sense is probably the least used as a musical descriptor, though some musicians connect the music they hear, compose, and play to olfactory experiences.

Scriabin, for instance, liked to waft smells into the concert hall to enhance performances of his music. Perhaps the potential inspiration lies in our physical responses to a smell—such as the spontaneous repulsion from the pungent odor of ammonia versus the comforting allure of fresh-baked bread.

HUMAN EMOTIONS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND STORIES IN MUSIC

Besides dynamics, emotions are often the first expressive elements that young musicians explore—such as the simple contrast of a "happy" piece in a major key and a "sad" piece in a minor one. Of course these adjectives are fairly superficial, barely addressing the diverse and complex variations that exist within either emotion, from pleasant to ecstatic, from melancholy to anguish—beyond which there is a whole world of human feeling and expression: anger, pride, compassion, sarcasm, tenderness, reluctance, and so forth. The musical expression of these emotions requires a wide range of tone color, and can influence the choices of tempo, timing, and articulations. Some musicians physically embody each mood like an actor in order to create a convincing performance.

More specifically, here are some areas and examples of human expression:

Vocal or verbal expression. Musicians explore the sounds of questions, answers, laughing, crying, exclaiming, scolding, whispering, and so on by listening for inflection, qualities of tone, and vowel and consonant sounds. Singers must learn the pronunciation and meaning of lyrics in a foreign language, but instrumentalists can also explore qualities of sound in the native language of a composer to learn the sounds that were part of his or her everyday life.

Physical expression. Gestures are also used to convey a variety of moods and emotions. Consider what kind of body language suggests pride, and compare it to the kind that communicates anger or the kind that soothes. Such movements, or sometimes simply the posture that embodies an emotional state, can be used to create expressive sounds on an instrument.

Stylistic differences are also readily expressed with gestures: a rustic dance might evoke swinging, swaying, or bouncing; a march encourages straight-line, up-and-down movements; the smoother, more connected sounds of a song evoke a similar smooth and extended gesture. These movements can be transferred via hands, bow, baton, or breath to create a satisfying musical parallel on an instrument, with the voice, or in communication with an orchestra.

Character and storytelling. Operas are the epitome of story-telling in music. To perform in an opera, a singer must identify with the character's personality and his or her interaction with other characters; those performing in lead roles must understand that character's psychology and personal evolution within in the story.

All this must be portrayed not only with gestures and actions on stage, but through expressive musicianship and great technical command. While opera offers us the most overt example of character and storytelling in music, other genre invite musicians to dig deeply to convey personalities, stories, and imagery. To perform art songs like Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*, programmatic music like Strauss' *Don Quixote* and Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf,* or even Robert Schumann's piano works assigned to his alter egos Eusebius and Florestan, musicians assimilate the distinct personalities and traits of one or more characters and explore ways to portray them by varying the tone, articulation, and style. Similar approaches can be used to enhance the embedded imagery in pieces like Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* or Debussy's *La Mer,* but a composition needn't be programmatic to benefit from the musician creating characters and "telling a story" in any performance.

MUSICAL PACING BASED ON EXPERIENCES

Personal Inventory: Think about an accelerando that creates the perfect transition to a quicker tempo, or a rallentando that leads into a well-timed final cadence. What factors or parameters do you use, consciously or unconsciously, to determine what feels right?

While musicians must have a working understanding of meters and tempos, as well as all the markings and conventions that require altering those in performance, there is no quadratic equation for rubato, nor a tried-and true formula for pacing a ritardando. Yet timings explored through common images or experiences have a universally familiar feel. Cause-and-effect timings, especially those that produce varied results, cultivate flexibility and interpretive spontaneity in musical performance. Consider these possibilities:

- Pacing an accelerando: Drop a ball and watch it bounce faster and faster.
- Rubato: Picture a roller coaster, a swing, or waves on a beach.
- Timing a fermata: Envision a ball thrown in the air with varying amounts of thrust: more means the balls takes longer to return, less means it comes back faster.
- Ritardando and caesura: Under what circumstances might you coast to a stop, pull back quickly, or stop abruptly?
- Stretching notes into the peak of a phrase: When biking up a hill, you're slowest right near the top and going over the crest before picking up speed again.

Consider This

The word "moving" is commonly used to describe an effective performance. Emotionally something shifts inside the listener, giving the sense of feeling "transported," "lifted up," or "carried away." Composers' melodies are sometimes described as "floating" or "soaring," but of course not all renditions actually "get off the ground." What qualities in music-making allow a melody to feel weightless or soaring? What kind of performance draws the audience in, or sweeps them away?

Humor. It is probably true that good joke telling is an art form like any other: as soon as it has been defined, it defies its own definition. Nevertheless, jokes are told in music, and it helps to ponder the sense of timing that makes people smile, even laugh out loud. The setup is important, because listeners need to anticipate the next probable musical event. In music sometimes the composer supplies us with the punch line—the unexpected "answer." But even the most predictable musical moment placed just a little later than the audience expects it makes them laugh when the joke is on them. Sometimes the answer comes quicker than expected, catching listeners off guard, before they've had time to predict it. Subtle and slightly unexpected shifts in pacing can keep an audience enthralled, as if they are being taken on a marvelous joy ride.

Consider This

Victor Borge was both a masterful pianist and a comic genius. His exquisite timing was evident in both his humor and his musicianship, and the sparkle and spontaneity of his performances are as inspiring as they are entertaining. If you've never seen one of his archival performances—or haven't watched one in a long time—be sure to do so soon.

RELATING MUSIC TO RELIGION AND ART

Religion and spirituality have long been a source for inspiration in musical composition and performance. Themes of forgiveness, reverence, redemption, resurrection, immortality, purity, and exaltation provide interpretive approaches that can be both personal and universal.

Art. Painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature provide further inspiration for musicians who experience a connection between a work of art and their musical interpretation. For instance, the cultural significance of great architecture recently inspired a youth orchestra conductor to offer a concert series to teach the relationship between

architecture and music. One of Picasso's angular paintings can provide interpretive insight for the performance of a twentieth-century composition; and the balance and strength, of Michelangelo's *David*, with the statue's exaggerated large hands, could embolden a performer to trust his more heartfelt and impassioned interpretations at his upcoming recital. Such artist-to-artist connections are usually very personal and subjective yet they have the power to provide tremendous creative inspiration.

> There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion.
>
> FRANCIS BACON

RELATING MUSIC TO MATH AND SCIENCE

The scientific and mathematical world, like music, has a way of both amplifying and defying rational thought. Even areas that seem absolute can have a powerful impact on expressive music making. Here are some possibilities:

Science. Chemistry, biology, and other studies of nature can offer inspiring images for musical interpretation: chemical reactions, metamorphosis, symmetry, patterns, and even chaos in nature. Astronomy offers images: shooting stars, black holes, the mysterious vastness of the universe, and so forth. Physics is a great source for analogies related to gravity and weightlessness or time and timelessness. Even surface tension, which allows a glass of water to be overfilled, can be used as an analogy for expressive notes that seem too full to fit within a given tempo.

Math. Numbers have been used for centuries to create patterns and symbolism in musical composition. Bach's love of numbers and numerical symbolism has been an intriguing part of compositional analysis of his music. Some composers have studied the "Golden Ratio" (a proportion based on the Fibonacci series 2:3:5:8:13, etc.) for application in their compositions, just as architects have used it for their designs, and a performer's awareness of this ratio can shed light on interpretations. Crescendos based on an addition (2 + 2 + 2) offer a terrace effect; an exponential equation (2 × 2 × 2) produces a bell-shaped crescendo that is powerful, almost explosive.

In the most literal sense, "feeling the music" is our ability to connect music to life experiences. Words and images, while not always sufficient, have the potential to explain the relationship of music to life, create pathways toward meaningful expression, and, at best, offer inspiration for transcendent performances.

Ideas for Further Exploration

1. Choose one interpretive element in the section *Context and Language of Music*. Select a phrase from a piece which, in order to be played musically,

relies on the integration of that element. Perform the phrase with an interpretation that lacks the chosen element, and let others guess what is missing. If need be, perform a second time, adding the element to the interpretation to help identify the missing ingredient. Be creative and have fun!

2. Review the list "Parameters for Shaping a Musical Phrase." Do you agree with this list? Is there anything you would you add, take away, or reword? Jot down your thoughts, and then refine your words to create your own guidelines. If possible, share it with a fellow musician, and continue to refine and clarify your ideas.
3. Choose one piece (or movement of a larger work) that you are currently preparing. Imagine that a friend who cannot hear wants you to describe your piece to him or her. Write a full description of the piece with moods, storytelling, sensory experiences, and so forth to help your friend understand as fully as possible the essence of the music.
4. Listen to a CD of movie music without watching the movie, and jot down ideas about feeling or character is being portrayed in each. Watch the movie, listening for these themes. How well do the music and the performance convey the meaning? How closely did your descriptions come to the actual use in the movie?
5. Choose a piece from your repertoire (recently performed work or one you are currently preparing). Write a sentence or two about what is most meaningful to you about the piece. Now research the composer and the background of the piece. Dig deeply—find out what was happening in the composer's life at the time the piece was written, any information that's available about the circumstances or reason the piece was composed. Describe how this knowledge could enhance your understanding and performance of this selection.

Recommended Reading

Blum, D. (1977). *Casals and the Art of Interpretation.* London: Heinemann.

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