

STRING VIBRATIONS NEWSLETTER

Fall/Winter 2001

<http://www.musicalmud.com/asta/>

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

September 2001

Dear Colleagues,

This is the second letter I write for this issue of our Vibrations Newsletter. The first one, now in the trash, seems irrelevant in light of September 11's national tragedy. I, as have most of us, have spent a good amount of time watching the TV and making contact with friends and family. One such contact was a call I received a lifelong friend, my college roommate, who is a string teacher in Memphis. She shared with me a wonderful viewpoint. Immediately following the tragedy, her young students asked her, "Ms. Beard, are you scared?" She responded, "I don't have time to be scared. I am on a mission, and that mission to be the best I can be so that I can help you be the best you can be."

My friend understands what we can accomplish through teaching music. In our customary roles as defenders of our music programs, justifiers of salaries for our symphony orchestras, and worriers about the future, I think we often forget that there exist some kinds of music that can empower us and our students through our chosen medium.

Music is a very powerful tool. Through music, we have the ability to ease pain, illicit hope, instill patriotism. Did you notice that while athletic and social events were cancelled following the tragedy, many concerts continued as planned? I have to believe that this is evidence that, although we don't always feel it, people know that what we do is valuable and important.

Most importantly, the impact music can have on our students cannot be belittled. I believe that to teach music with a vengeance, developing love and respect for music and its multiculturalism, can be a patriotic act. It is through this belief that I issue you a challenge:

Find ways to use music to help your students deal with this tragedy. Be creative about letting everyone know what music can do for individuals, classes, schools and communities in this time of sorrow. If you wish, send your ideas to me so that I can share them with others in our strong ASTAwithNSOA organization. I, in turn, will pass the ideas of others on to you.

There are lots of happenings in our ASTAwithNSOA chapter. Read on to learn more.

Sincerely,

Kip Mason
Colorado ASTAwithNSOA President

CMEA CLINIC/CONFERENCE
January 24-26, 2001

Lots of great string stuff and two national clinicians!

Help your professional organization —
stay at the Broadmoor this year!

Important Deadlines for Grants and other ASTA activities

All ASTAwithNSOA grants have applications available
on the National website: www.astaweb.com

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| October 1 | Codabows for America Awards
Potter violins Instrument Awards |
| October 12 | Tapes due for National Solo Competition, Colorado
Preliminary |
| November 1 | String Industry Council Grants (up to \$1,000 to support
start-up initiatives that create new string players in a
community) |
| November 3 | General Membership meeting at Western States Orchestra
Festival in Greeley. Time TBA. |
| January 25 | General Membership meeting at CMEA Clinic/Conference,
Broadmoor Hotel, Colorado Springs; 9:00 am, Jones Room |
| February 1 | String Industry Council Grants deadline |
| April 1 | Merle J. Issac School Orchestra Composition Contest
deadline
Application deadline, Urban Outreach grants |
| May 1 | String Industry Council Grants deadline |
| February 12 | ASTAwithNSOA Special Project Grant deadline |

SUBMISSIONS FROM OUR MEMBERSHIP

This section of our newsletter is devoted to bringing you writings by professionals in our organization. This edition, we are pleased to share with you some ideas from a student of Dr. Greg Hurley, formerly an instructor of String Pedagogy at the University of Northern Colorado. Let us know your thoughts! And feel free to contribute your work for possible future publication!

Teaching Good Practice
Jennifer Crum
May, 2001

Practicing. It's a love-hate relationship for every string player. It's the only way we have to improve on our instruments, yet if it is done wrong more harm can be done than good. As in everything else in string playing, one must first know how to perform the task correctly before one can effectively teach another player how to shape their own playing.

The first step on the road to good practice is to develop a practice schedule. By developing a schedule, one insures that practice time is automatically put into their daily routine. Remember when making a schedule that

it's not so much the amount of time one practices, but the quality of the time used. Many people automatically assume that the more time they spend playing their instruments, the better, no matter what sounds are coming out. Three to four hours should be a sufficient amount of time for most people as long as all of the time is utilized productively. In order to teach a student to budget their practice time, practice cards or charts are very useful. These cards or charts can be reinforced by the use of small treats or prizes such as fun size candy bars or stickers. To teach productive practicing one can use one or all of the following techniques during lesson times. The utmost important factor that contributes to productive practicing is keeping the mind engaged. This is to be remembered and used in all of the techniques that follow.

The foundation of good practice is, once scheduled, how one should divide their practice time. There are three main areas that practice time should be divided equally between. These divisions are, according to Galamian, technique, interpretation, and performance. Technique time should be devoted entirely to scales in all of their different forms, etudes, and passage work from repertoire. Difficulties in the repertoire passages can also be applied to scale work by adapting a particularly difficult bowing or rhythm to the scales where there is not the added difficulty of learning notes. Interpretation time is strictly for running the piece in order to gain musical stopping places which later take the form of stumbling blocks when performing from memory. Performance time ideas. This time should not in any way be interrupted to fix passages, an "X" should be placed in the margin for the next day's technical work. Not stopping helps to give the performer a sense of the work as a whole, and not ingrain should also be used when one has an impending recital or other performance. This time should always be utilized with an accompanist or other collaborator, and with the thought of an audience listening always in the performer's mind. These actions will help to simulate the actual performance situation.

The above time delineations can also be used during the lesson, with directions to the student to "try this at home, too." Always let the student run a piece once in the lesson without stopping them. Make mental notes as they perform for you, or, if you must, make some very brief notes in a notebook, keeping in mind that the student deserves your undivided attention. Later, use what you have noticed in the performance situation to concentrate on specific technical issues. To keep the student's mind engaged, you might ask them to play a certain passage again and diagnose what they see as needing to be improved upon. After the student has come up with a few areas that are in need of improvement, ask them ways in which they can make these improvements. Not only will this keep the student's mind engaged, but it will also make them be an active participant in their lesson. Participation in lessons ultimately leads to greater information retention and also increases the chance that the student will employ techniques used in the lesson in his own practice time.

Techniques used for practicing passage work vary greatly, so not all of them can be discussed here. A few of the main techniques are, slow practicing, variances, and repetition. Again, all of these need to be performed with the utmost mental involvement to be of any use at all. Many people believe that slow practicing is a very valuable tool, and this is true to some extent. Slow practicing is important when working on intonation problems so that each pitch can fully register in the ear and the brain has time to hear it as right or wrong. Although helpful in practicing for good intonation, slow practicing should only be used in moderation. A problem that arises in people who only practice slowly is that they never really gain the fleetness of fingers needed to perform rapid passages. In order to gain both good intonation and dexterity of the fingers, one must practice both slowly and quickly. Practicing a variety of different ways can work wonders when trying to learn a particularly intricate passage. A few different variances to try are, changing the rhythm to something more difficult in a passage of straight eighth or sixteenth notes. Some rhythms to try are dotted eighth sixteenth, sixteenth dotted eighth, or anything else which places shifts on awkward parts of the beat. Changing articulation or bowings are other techniques which produce quick results. These must be used carefully, though, as to not confuse the mind as to what is correct. A final method of practice is to play a passage backwards. All of these methods get the mind to think about the passage a little differently by making it more difficult. When one returns to the way the passage is written after having done a more difficult version of it, all of the sudden it is much easier to play.

Repetition is another form of practice that when misused, can cause more harm than good. The most common mistake performers make when using repetition to practice is that they do not leave any time between the repetitions. Repeating a passage over and over with no breaks ultimately leads to the ingraining of mistakes. The mind needs time to process information and to diagnose problems. Incessant repetition does not allow for this. When using repetition, be sure to leave plenty of time between each time the passage is played to think about what was wrong, and how to fix the problem. After diagnosing what went wrong, isolate just the problems of the passage and work them out separately.

As with the different types of practice, these methods for preparing passage work can easily be incorporated into a lesson. The best thing about these methods is that they produce results quickly, which encourages the student to continue this same type of work at home. When a lot of progress is made in a short amount of time, it makes practice time a lot more exciting and less of a chore. Students cannot figure out how to practice effectively on their own. Practice techniques need to be given as much attention in the lesson as

repertoire and etudes in order to help the student to improve at a discernible rate, therefore keeping him interested in his own success.

Greetings from the President Elect,

I would like to say thanks to all of you who came to the summer conference. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity to learn and share with others. A thank you that was left off at the closing lunch was to Eric Brandhorst and Music and Arts for providing the incredible cello quartet from Paris. What a special treat for all of us. Thank you Eric for thinking of CASTA. I hope Fall programs are well around the State of Colorado and I look forward to seeing all of you at CMEA.

Michelle Ewer
Colorado ASTAwithNSOA President-Elect

