

Music as Discipline

As the students of the Freemantle Children's Music Conservatory scale higher and higher altitudes of musical achievement, I feel it is appropriate to review some of this year's successes, and to make some general comments on the subject of musical discipline.

First and foremost, the three conservatory large ensembles, The Beginning Baroque Strings, The Freemantle Community Orchestra, and the Galadrigals, have developed, from their crude, rudimentary musical beginnings, into very listenable groups. The orchestra and the madrigal group still suffer from lack of personnel, but they both have experienced about a 40% increase this year, and this trend shows no sign of slowing down. This spring and summer we are presenting literature from an interestingly rich stylistic palette, including a Mozart Piano Concerto, a Bach Violin Concerto (with six soloists), a minimalist piece by Steve Reich, a student-composed orchestral piece, choral music from 1650 to 1980, and a concerto by yours truly.

It is not only surprising that the classes can pull off such a convincing display of this diverse mix of idioms, but that they are starting to UNDERSTAND what they are doing—they are getting into it on a deeper than amateur level. They are not just going through the motions, apeline, they are really getting it, getting the idea, getting the spirit—becoming personally identified with an abstraction. This is what happens when the conscious mind is taxed to its maximum—a door opens and higher mind kicks in.

This is also a qualitative difference between a discipline and an activity; an activity is a kind of gentle play, where the mind is invited to choose randomly from an array of minor delights, enjoying togetherness with others for a moment here and there, and not working too darned hard. A discipline not only gives us access to that same feeling of corporate consciousness, but offers it to us in extended, intensified moments of time; this is not to mention the personal growth that takes place when one is obliged to reach out to another human being with his best, for 50 minutes at a time. Discipline leads to inner strength capable of withstanding life's deepest insults, and dealing with its knottiest complexities.

Discipline begins with physical things, manipulation of muscles, materials, etc.; then an inner state develops, becoming an imaginary model with which the subject can consistently create an outer reality. After constant harping by me on such issues as posture, movement, marking parts, and focused attention, I have managed to habituate, in the students, many of the routines which will eventually become ritualized; the children have begun to understand, intuitively, the significance and spiritual resonance of the procedures we practice, and have begun to treat them with a deepened respect. From an immature rabble we have become transformed into a very single-minded group pursuing a level of excellence which is beyond us, but which we feel capable of attaining. We have had our share of behavior problems this year, but even the most rambunctious students have started to come around and get the idea that we are involved in serious business here.

I've just been reading "The Road Less traveled", by M. Scott Peck, and ran across this section which is apropos to the subject of achieving higher consciousness through discipline:

"In my vision the collective unconscious is God; the conscious is man as individual; and the personal unconscious is the interface between them. . . I have said that the ultimate goal of spiritual growth is for the individual to become as one with God. It is to know with God. Since the unconscious is God all long, we may further define the goal of spiritual growth to be the attainment of godhood by the conscious self."

And so, if disciplined work leads to ritualization, and ritualization leads to collective consciousness, then it follows that disciplined work leads to, by any name, an enhancement of the subjective experience by some incalculable factor.

I tell the kids that the essence of music is the expression, nay, the creation of, identity. That the reason we become more ourselves by focussing our energies on an abstract reality is this: by bringing into the world, out of ourselves, a clear, sharp representation of an inner vision, we make ourselves to resonate in tune with that vision, and experience both

1.) an enhanced level of ego resolution, a sense, an understanding of self, and, yet at the same time

2.) a higher level of collective consciousness—a shared, less sharply defined, but larger, more inclusive state of consciousness.

It is the experience of these two accelerated tempi of consciousness states that makes music a transforming power; and it is the influence of this power on subjective reality that gives musicians that inner strength—that connection with deep wellsprings of intuitive insight; it is the act of will, the facing up to the massively involved complexities of musical performance with steadfast, undaunted attention, that gives musicians improved fluency with such issues as problem-solving, creativity, mental and emotional stamina, not to mention social graces of a highly civilized and subtle nature.

These rich benefits are the consequence of self-discipline. Teaching discipline to 8-year-olds has to be the trickiest and most rewarding accomplishment of my modestly successful career. It takes hours and hours and hours of repetition to get the kids to see how to get the most out of themselves, but I must boast that this message is getting across even more effectively than I thought possible. I don't think that my private teaching is that much better than it ever has been, but the extra classes have allowed me to make comments and work on issues that somehow are less appropriate to the private arena than to the group environment. Getting a bunch of high energy kids, who are all so curious about every other thing in the whole world but music—to get them to really pull together to create a beautiful thing, is a feat of miraculous, not to say cosmic, magnitude.

Some parents have said to me, "How can they be over there for **six hours** doing music?" I am tempted to give a glib answer, but the fact is, I don't really know what keeps some of these kids over here all day, except that they must like it, they must even like me a little bit, and I can easily live with that. I like spending the day with them, and showing them all the different faces that music has, and all the different pictures of ourselves the music displays.

This depth of investigation is what gives my students an aura of authority when they perform. I can see how people might see it as six hours of activity, but I can assure you it is more than that. I was disappointed to have to terminate the composition class and the Friday technique class, they were such good classes, but not enough people were coming, and not enough people were paying, so it doesn't work for me. However, it is my goal to

continue to come up with more class ideas and make them available whenever possible.

As I look toward the future, I am overwhelmed by possibilities. One thing is for sure, I must join some regional and national music teacher associations and get my students out into the mainstream of youth music—competitions, workshops, recitals and the like—they need the little blue medals and the resume entries. Another thing is also for sure: I have about eight or nine students who are at the point where, very soon, music could start being of real practical value to them in terms of:

- 1.) scholarships,
- 2.) college acceptance,
- 3.) professional and semi professional local exposure,
- 4.) professional activities outside Pullman,
- 5.) extra money teaching,
- 6.) leadership experience appropriate for inclusion on a resume.

I suspect that many of you are unaware of the degree to which excellence in music is rewarded, especially in the academic world, but also in the metropolitan music business scene. I have no trouble imagining each of the above mentioned eight or nine students getting full or partial college scholarships with music, and I fully expect, with the training I am giving them, that those students who go away to college in big cities will also be able to pay their rent playing and/or teaching music professionally. Not that I ever encourage students to major in music—I do not. It is just too risky—if you CAN do something else, do it. But music can be a fine part-time job for anybody with any kind of day gig, whether it be waitress or doctor—not to mention the fun you have and the youthful intuitive state of mind you keep, in spite of nature's efforts to drag you down with age.

With these words in mind let me encourage all my band of brothers to move on toward our shared goal. Let us continue, ever more vividly, to conjure images from the collective unconscious; let us contemplate and adore them.

RFT

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