

An Integrated Path to Musicianship

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RATIONALE

Over time, music learning has become increasingly specialized. As a result, college students might study a Haydn String Quartet in one course, but not in any other courses. Not only is there little overlap between courses, but most classroom experiences (e.g. music theory) don't involve performance even though the students are all performers. Without integration, music training is analogous to learning construction by discussing nails, hammers, and building materials, but never actually constructing anything. Students should not only be expected to construct houses as part of a construction curriculum, but should have a "foundation" for building them! Today's music student, absent of any integrated experiences in their curriculum, must unfortunately learn these inter-relationships on their own after graduation. Paul Davies addresses the problems of specialization in his book, *God and Physics*, stating that "You can't always take a problem apart in order to solve it. Sometimes you only solve it by putting it together."

To prevent further specialization, we created a semester-long unit for the Music 210/212 Music Theory course at UW-Stevens Point that unites virtually all of our faculty members, courses and students through a single musical work. This work served as a review for the course. For example, the piece used all twelve intervals within an octave, both ascending and descending, and a wide variety of rhythmic values and articulations. The piece also reviewed many types of modulations and non-harmonic tones (depending on the student's harmonization).

METHODOLOGY

Faculty members perform the work, each performing on a different instrument (or voice type) in a different key. Each faculty member recorded the work independently from one another, only using the musical notation as their guide. This approach encouraged the pure intent of each performer and established uniform evaluation criteria. The unaccompanied texture of the piece allowed all of the faculty performers to be in total control of the musical environment, while providing the opportunity for subsequent harmonizations and orchestrations. In selected faculty performances, wrong notes were strategically played for the students to aurally identify.

Students were then provided with the faculty recordings. Students were encouraged to LISTEN, rather than rely upon the printed music. The emphasis on listening (or transcribing) cannot be overemphasized—MUSIC IS SOUND, not dots and lines on a page! Accordingly, students listened and carefully examined each interpretation to learn what made it "musical." Students also conducted and sang with each interpretation to learn about rubato and other expressive devices (e.g. portamento). Pablo Casals perhaps phrased interpretation best by saying, "the art of interpretation is NOT to play what is written."

After careful listening, students demonstrated each interpretation by recording themselves playing and singing (adjusting octaves as necessary) alongside each recording using a multitrack cassette recorder. (*NOTE: music theory students at UW-Stevens Point bring their instruments to class each day. Vocalists, Pianists and Percussionists play piano.*) Recording alongside each faculty performer allowed students to “think” like teachers other than those with which they normally study. Students were encouraged to match each faculty performance EXACTLY (e.g. if the performer on the tape played “bravura”, the student played equally “bravura” regardless of how the music was notated). Students were also encouraged to discuss each interpretation with each respective faculty performer. Next the students performed *their own* interpretations. The ultimate goal was for the students to arrive at their own independent interpretation resulting from the various faculty models. Michelangelo expressed this idea, saying, “You cannot surpass that which you cannot equal.” The student’s interpretation became the Soprano voice in their subsequent harmonizations.

Each student then created their own harmonization, using common practice part-writing techniques. To review, students were asked to visually analyze the melody to identify any specific techniques that were used (e.g. inversion). Once this was completed, they created a supporting ATB accompaniment for the melody (soprano part). Students then notated a Roman numeral analysis of all chords, modulations and non-harmonic tones for their harmonization. Students then orchestrated their harmonizations for performance by themselves and/or their classmates. Students rehearsed and recorded their orchestrations using a multitrack cassette recorder. The rehearsals forced students to “think” like conductor/teachers and perform like chamber musicians. Finally, students then completed a self-assessment, discussing how their process and/or product in each part of the assignment matched those of the faculty.

CONCLUSION

This project allowed students to experience many facets of a musical experience while also uniting the entire faculty and student community of music teachers/learners in a collaborative enterprise. Since the student was responsible for all of the parts, the recordings ultimately reflected EVERYTHING that the student understood about music making: structural analysis, interpretation, rehearsal planning, solo and ensemble performance skills, conducting, singing, aural training, harmony, music history (harmonizing in the styles of different composers), orchestration, transcription, technology, composition, and pedagogy. Throughout the unit, students were assessed in each area. Their grades were determined through their self-assessments, their performances (instrumental and vocal), their harmonizations, their orchestrations, their rehearsal process, their analysis, and the fidelity of their recordings.

In spite of the time required to implement this project, learning one piece comprehensively proved more valuable than learning numerous pieces in isolation. Ultimately this integrated experience deepened the students' understanding of music. Students agreed, saying in their self-assessments, “I found this assignment extremely beneficial in teaching me different ways of interpreting the same musical material. By ‘getting inside the head’ of different faculty artists, I gained a greater understanding of what subtleties separate great artists from all of the others.” While this unit has proven to be effective for our university students, this is only one way that we

can teach comprehensive musicianship. Ideally, this model will serve as a catalyst for continued exploration.