

Between the Notes

Dr. Denise Grant

As conductors, we don't just conduct the beats, we conduct the music. We strive to show how the music should be played, not just when.

We should have the same expectations for our students.

Create an Inviting Environment

- 1) Get to know your students and help them get to know each other. Create a rehearsal environment where students feel safe letting their guard down - where it is okay to be vulnerable and feel deeply.
 - a) CD Project - develop trust and openness in the classroom
 - b) Questionnaire - get to know your students
 - c) Retreats
- 2) Give the students everything you know about the music.
 - a) Create a chart with the overall form, melodic (What are the main themes? Who plays them? Who supports them?), and harmonic (major cadential points) development, and other key musical characteristics (rhythm, articulation and style, dynamics, orchestration, and texture).
 - b) Historical context
 - c) Composer information
- 3) Cooperative Learning - Shift responsibility to the students for their own music-making.
 - a) Armed with more knowledge about the music, challenge them to listen intently and make adjustments on their own. Ask them what they are hearing and don't be quick to give them the answers. Encourage them to hold one another accountable. (This frees you to focus on the how moments.)
 - b) Create chamber groups of 4-5 (of varying instrumentation) and have them rehearse the large ensemble music in smaller settings.
 - c) Benjamin Zander uses "white sheets" with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra - he leaves blank pieces of paper on every music stand and asks for musical input. A variation of this might be to ask students to respond to specific questions:
 - i) What went well for you in rehearsal today?
 - ii) What went well for the ensemble?
 - iii) What will you work on to improve for next rehearsal?
 - iv) What can the ensemble improve?
- 4) Change things up - do something differently.
 - a) Turn out the lights and play a chorale or lyrical piece from memory.
 - b) Devote a rehearsal to chamber music (see above – 3b).
 - c) Use creative warm ups that incorporate intense listening. (see below)
 - d) Use a random seating plan for most of a rehearsal to encourage intense listening.

Create Opportunities to Connect with the Music

- 1) Sing - Unencumbered by technical limitations, students connect to the music more immediately.
- 2) Dance - Connect to dance forms on a more physical level.
 - a) Invite a dancer to teach the students the dances from Courtly Aires and Dances, or the sword dance from Soldier's Procession and Sword Dance.

- b) Get students up and moving to a waltz. They need to feel the lilt on beat one with the lighter beats two and three. This helps 6/8 immensely!
- 3) Dalcroze Eurythmics – Experience music more fully through movement.
- a) There is no prescribed choreography – students improvise their movements to embody how the music looks.
 - b) Encourages intense listening.
 - c) Activities might include: mirror phrasing, following (moving to the pulse, responding to the changes in music with shifts in their body), replacement games.
 - d) Sizzling, singing, clapping, tapping – all get the students feeling the pulse in their bodies.

Dalcroze resources

- J. Schnebly-Black and S. Moore (2003). *The Rhythm Inside: Connecting body, mind, and spirit through music*. Alfred Publishing: ISBN 0-7390-3243-7
- Virginia Hoge Mead (1994). *Dalcroze Eurythmics in Today's Music Classroom*. Schott: ISBN 0-9304-4851-0
- Also: www.themovementofmusic.com/publications.htm

- 4) Imagery - Creative listening (painting and writing)
- a) Before handing out a piece of music, play a recording of the piece several times and encourage the free-flow of images that come to mind. Yes, a full class. You will gain far more in musicality than you lose in “woodshedding” time.
 - b) Provide students with paper and coloured pencils, markers, or paint.
 - c) Instruct the students to draw (or write) whatever they feel the music is saying - there is no right or wrong response.
 - d) To encourage further collegiality, put students in groups of four and ensure everyone's ideas are heard and included.
- 5) Connect with the composer
- a) Invite the composer to a rehearsal. Students learn about the compositional process, and feel a more personal connection with the music.
 - b) If distance and cost is an issue, start a dialogue with the composer via telephone or email. Or even a webcam!
 - c) Find out everything you can about the composer and share this information with your students. They connect with popular music because they know what these artists are about – what they stand for and believe in. Give them the same opportunity with the music they play with you.

These are just a few ideas to help you create an environment that invites a feelingful approach to music-making - helping your students get beyond the when of playing and start focusing on the how. Get creative and add your own ideas to the list, and then share them with your colleagues.

Shift Responsibility to Your Students

“Give them what they need, and then get out of the way.”
- Frederick Fennell

After your preparation, the single most important rehearsal technique is teaching your students to listen. For...

1. intonation (learning instrument tendencies and making adjustments)
2. balance (quantity of sound)
3. blend (quality of sound)

4. precision (ensemble togetherness)
 5. articulation styles (how notes begin)
 6. matching note lengths and shapes
 7. releases (how notes end)
- (list compiled by Richard Blatti, Ohio State University)

Strategies to develop ensemble listening

- change the ensemble seating (front row to back, woodwinds face brass, sit anywhere you want, percussion in centre of circle, etc.)
- remove the conductor (give students responsibility for the pulse)
- communicate more non-verbally from the podium (try a "monk" rehearsal)
- use sounds more than words and more analogies than literal descriptions
- have students memorize a chorale for warm up (no music to read, focus on listening)

Engage students in the warm up

A warm up should:

1. Be more than a B-flat concert scale in whole notes.
2. Focus the ensemble; prepare students to rehearse.
3. Be connected to the repertoire – tonally, rhythmically.
4. Teach students to listen – for balance, blend, intonation, tone, texture

Train students to watch you. Vary the scales and chorales you do, and vary tempo, dynamics, style, etc. Students should not be on autopilot during a warm up.

Some examples:

The Changing Scale

Explain to students that the length of each note in the scale will depend on your conducting pattern. They will change scale degrees every time you come back to 1.

Ex. 1234 | 123 | 123456 | 12 | 12345 | 123 | 12 | 1234

Students can also play quarter notes for this exercise. If they play quarter notes, vary your conducting style to include: legato - staccato – tenuto - marcato articulation styles, giving students two musical concepts to focus on. (Add dynamics to make a third.)

The Disappearing Scale

Start the ensemble off without their instruments, and have them clap a subdivided 4 pattern (eighth notes) together, counting aloud (1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+). Then have the students internalise the counting and clap one set. When clapping the second set, have them substitute a rest for count 8. When clapping the third set, have them substitute a rest for counts 7 and 8, and so on, until there is only silence. The next step, after all of the counts have changed to silence, is to continue through another set of rests, clapping count 8 aloud. The following set, clapping counts 7 and 8, and so on, until all of the notes have returned. The teacher should not lead this exercise. Rather, the students should be responsible for the pulse.

The Disappearing Scale - Variation 1

Returning to the instruments, have the students play a scale, ascending and descending in quarter notes, without repeating the tonic or stopping between notes. Students should breathe where necessary. Follow the same format as above, replacing the 8th scale degree, then the 7th and 8th, and so on. Again, after starting the students, the teacher should not lead the exercise to allow the students to feel the pulse and listen to one another.

The Disappearing Scale - Variation 2

Return to the scale, ascending and descending in a loop, in quarter notes. Have the students settle into a pulse and then introduce this element: when you raise your hand, the students continue (the scale) in silence. When you lower your hand a few beats later, the sound returns on the appropriate scale degree. Continue signalling at different places until the final cut off. Initially, have the students continue to finger the scale notes during the silent beats. Eventually, have them “think” the notes during the silences, without the fingerings.

Varying Tempos

Have students play the familiar round *Are You Sleeping?* by ear. Next, have students play the first section of the round at normal tempo and the second half (the echo response) twice as fast. Do not conduct, but have the students feel the underlying quarter note pulse in some way – toe tapping, body movements, etc. Then have students play the first section of the round twice as fast and the echo section at normal tempo. Finally, divide the ensemble in two and have each half play a different version simultaneously.

Dove-Tailing Chorales

Lead your ensemble through a chorale, observing the fermatas only as phrase endings. After the students have played through the chorale once, ask them to play it again, sounding only the quarter notes. All other notes should be treated as rests. Play it through again, this time playing everything except the quarter notes. Finally, instruct stand partners to divide the responsibilities: one plays only quarter notes and the other plays everything except the quarter notes. The goal is perfect dovetailing of the musical line between partners. Students will need to be precise with attacks and releases and modulate their dynamics carefully. This exercise can be applied to repertoire as well. It develops excellent listening skills.

Making the Connection Through Gesture

First, preparation done ahead of time will pay off tenfold. There is no substitute for knowing the score. Prepare and have a plan for every rehearsal.

“There are two kinds of conductors, those with their heads in the score and those with the score in their head.”
- Elizabeth Green

A few thoughts:

- Good conducting technique is good rehearsal technique. Learn to say what you want with gesture, and spend more time playing.
- “...inside all music, there is a great line, a natural line running right through, and one should never kill that line because one has to beat.” – Seiji Ozawa
- Ideal conducting technique is when the beat is less and less important.
- What if there were no bar lines? How would you show the shape of the music if you didn’t have to beat time? Copy a page of your score or a part and “white out” the bar lines — it changes everything! Share this with your students by drawing the shapes on the board and have them sizzle or sing the line as they see and feel it.
- Put your energy into the changes (in tempo, style, dynamics, etc.). The status quo will take care of itself.
- Is the music in control or under your control? If we truly want our musicians to become engaged in the process, for them to learn them how to think rather than us telling them what to think, we have to trust them and give them responsibility for their own music-making.

- To play fast you must play slow.
- Eddie Daniels
- This advice is not only for develop technique, but to hear phrasing. Phrasing is often the missing link, and it is the phrasing that grabs us! What happens in between the notes is so important, and our gesture must show this. Slow down. Listen. Move the air through the phrase.
- Is your gesture showing exactly what you want? Are you getting the sound you want? Videotape yourself (most digital camera have this feature) during part of a rehearsal and check in regularly with a critical and honest eye.
- “We must conduct from the inside – out. Break through the membrane!”
- H. Robert Reynolds
- Vulnerability opens the door to musicianship. Be courageous.

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