



Teaching Artistry in an Age of Technique

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Teaching Artistry in an Age of Technique

by Howard Hilliard

2013 Texas Bandmasters Association Conference

- I. How is artistry to be defined?
 - a. Subjectivity (“the eyes of the beholder”)
 - b. Objectivity (common judgment of history)
- II. What drives our perception of artistry?
 - a. Geographical location
 - 1) Where we are now (including all of that city’s/country’s history)
 - 2) Where we’ve been (city/town of origin)
 - b. Previous musical experiences
 - 1) Public/private instruction
 - 2) Performing groups
 - 3) Additional opportunities
- III. The elements of artistry
 - a. First of all. . .what artistry is **not**
 - b. Sound – the musician’s calling card. Includes:
 - 1) Tone quality of the individual player
 - 2) The instrument
 - 3) Timbre (tone color and intensity, body and breadth, soloistic vs. accompaniment sound)
 - c. Phrasing – the backbone of musical interpretation
 - 1) Western music and Eastern music; tension and release; dissonance and consonance
 - 2) Example etudes for teaching the shaping of a phrase - *Intermediate Studies for Developing Artists*
 - *Direction*
 - *Appoggiatura*
 - *Sinfonia*
 - d. Letting the music breathe
 - 1) Breaths are part of the lyric flow of the music *Pie Jesu*

- 2) Telling a student **not** to breathe is not a substitute for **when** and **how** to breathe
- 3) Healthy “breath control” for young brass players begins with short phrases *Direction* and *Appoggiatura*
- 4) Long phrases that do not breathe have more in common with machines than human beings
- 5) Thinning the integrity of the air column = poor embouchure development

e. Lyricism and the musical line

- 1) Development of lyrical phrasing includes slurred as well as articulated passages
- 2) The Cichowicz Flow Study - warming up with an unbroken air stream and musical line
- 3) Building connected lines through long tones
- 4) Adding flexibility with lip slurs - *Lip Slurs for Horn*

f. Adjudicating technique and musicianship

- 1) What defines a superior performance (either technical or lyrical) is subjective because of the listener
- 2) Someone with superior technique is often thought of as a better artist due to the reluctance of the listener to separate flawed execution of inspired musicianship from perfect execution of minimal musicianship

g. Dynamics and articulations - Impressions are everything

- 1) The composer’s markings as a starting point for interpretation
- 2) Non-linear crescendos/diminuendos
 - Making them organic to the music
 - Including intensity and timbre
 - Nuances for extended crescendos/diminuendos
- 3) End goal – the desired impression on the listener

IV. How artistry comes into play in large ensembles

- a. Solo artistry as criteria for participation in a large ensemble
- b. Utilizing both a collectivist and an individualist approach in ensembles (and how students benefit from each)

V. Encouraging artistic initiative for all

- a. “Feeding” your students the best possible music (especially on placement and chair tests)
- b. Insist on musicality, not just technical proficiency
- c. Level the playing field for students with braces and other physical issues (“No brass player left behind”)
- d. Lobby your regional supervisors for music selections that are compelling enough artistically to warrant 2½ months of practice.
- e. Use sight-reading materials that are actual musical examples of good quality (not just a way to “check off” for accidentals, triplets, dots, ties, etc.)
- f. Encourage your private lesson teachers to use material that develops students’ musicality as well as technique.
- g. Use drills or exercises for raw technique, and well-composed etudes for integrating that technique along with musicality. As a student progresses, musicality and technique become more intertwined where better technique opens up musical possibilities and shrewd musicianship can make up for technical shortcomings.

VI. Inspire Artistry

- a. Put the onus on your students to make an artistic contribution.
- b. Be specific and clear on what you think constitutes artistry.
- c. Praise their artistry when they take successful initiative.

VII. Final thoughts

- a. Great music compels the artist to find the musicality in the composition, allowing the listener to experience a direct connection to the music.
- b. Uninspired music devoid of musical content leaves the performer with nothing but barren technique and musical contrivance.
- c. Shallow music begets shallow interpretations, but early exposure to content-rich music can inspire artistic aspiration in a student for life.