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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING A COURSE IN MUSIC LISTENING

or in visual or literary arts or a combination, for that matter . . .

ROBERT TROTTER

Ways of re-thinking instruction of either general-campus students or music majors with regards to:

A FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING INSTRUCTION

Defining and organizing 1) aims; 2) resources needed to achieve them; 3) related activities both in and out of class sessions; and 4) ways to evaluate students and the course.

Comment: Even though such a framework may perilously resemble a method with recipe-like lesson plans, I have wanted to keep it abstract enough to stay safe from that threat. It might help clarify attitudes and behaviors, and lead to a heightened sense of being prepared. At its best it might lead to imaginative instructional modes to supplement lecturing with intermittent musical examples, and otherwise help to monitor and refine instruction.

A TAXONOMY OF INSTRUCTION

Offer information; use it to develop knowledge; then use knowledge to develop intellectual skills; use those skills to generate four progressively higher states-of-being: 1) acquaintance with a source of beauty; 2) understanding it through acquaintance; 3) valuing it through understanding; and 4) as capstone, readiness to use all these states—acquaintance, understanding, valuing—as vehicles for mutually confirming I-thou dialogue with others.

Comment: Within the areas of information and knowledge, there is a vital zone where right/wrong applies. Pay close attention to that zone, while keeping it subordinate to higher zones. Information and knowledge are inert until they become intellectual abilities. And despite the tendency

JOURNAL OF MUSIC THEORY PEDAGOGY

of behaviorally oriented scholars to deny inner states of being, we ignore them at our peril. "What can my students do?" is a far more useful question than "what do my students know?" My habit is to include sotto voce an additional clause: "what can my students do . . . and feel good doing when nobody's looking." I want thus to keep myself honest in reference to their motivation. Will they get a thrill out of distinguishing by ear or eye between Ockeghem and Obrecht, or is my conviction about the urgency of that activity an unexamined by-product of my own candidacy for an advanced degree?

THE IMPLICATIONS OF PLURALISM TODAY

We live in a world of staggering pluralism: many aims, topics, resources, teaching approaches seem potentially useful for different kinds of students. By refusing to back away from the complexity of that pluralism you will be pressed to find deep values. Since you can only hope to reach partial closure on any topic, seek a middle ground between being too brief and lingering too long. To pay enough attention to important matters, be ready to ignore or merely to touch on others, consciously shifting between extensive and intensive focus. Above all, do not evade the question of pace by engaging in a superficial chronological rat-race through one repertory.

Comment: Unlike European higher educational institutions with programs in music, in most comparable American institutions we not only seek to serve, under one roof, future professional composers, performers, scholars, and teachers; we also concern ourselves with democratic mediocrity as well as the choicest talent. And with all these commitments tugging at us, we then hope to do justice both to a venerable heritage and to an exciting new world that includes unparalleled availability of information.

SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

I include this item to call attention to the effect of all "para-lingual" aspects of communication: gestures, voice quality and intonation, clothing, furniture, among others. Although I can understand how someone might resent and reject suggestions for conscious refining of those aspects, it needs to be, above all, a *conscious* decision to do so! Classroom space, especially the seating, becomes a metaphor for cultural values and for professional/personal relationships derived from them. Fixed straight rows, with you in front, become a metaphor for your being both adversary and a fountain of wisdom. They also encourage the feeling of anonymity among students

MUSIC LISTENING

and their passive alienation from each other—each sees mainly backs of heads! If the seats are movable, re-arrange them to suit various aims; if not, look for alternatives within that limitation. For example, make small discussion groups with two people seated side by side turning around to face others seated behind them.

Comment: Some teachers and students seem to view any shift away from the traditional mode of unidirectional, authoritarian teaching as threatening, intrusive, and an abdication of responsibility. I recommend the shift toward a more hybrid image of teacher-student relationships—teacher as teacher, teacher as student, and both teacher and student as co-students of matters larger than either of them. I want to exemplify the virtues of that hybrid image, yet—rather than be prescriptive—merely urge you to consider making a conscious choice, rather than accepting *a priori* the more traditional role.

SUPPLEMENTING TRADITIONAL WRITTEN ACTIVITIES

Include a mixture of “kinetic activity” (responding with either sounds or body movements or both while listening to music), “iconic activity” (making graphic analogues somehow resembling shapes in the music), and “symbolic activity” (using spoken and written language and, if relevant to your aims, staff notation. Have students sing/hum central melodies during class time; have them move their bodies in harmony with both the time-patterning and the emotions awakened in them by the music. For some, this will be impossible, even offensively intrusive. Acknowledge the difficulty explicitly. Be ready to engage in the behaviors yourself if you’re willing and able to “quasi-perform.” Ask them to image movement with their eyes closed as if they were “dreaming the music,” focussing their aural awareness for a while by giving up visual territory. Let me simplistically call such activities “right-hemisphere” and urge that you let them happen free of evaluating the students’ involvement. Simply encourage them explicitly to get in touch with the potentially life-enhancing effects of participating.

Comment: Because education tends sometimes to be excessively abstract, focussing on verbal-cognitive and arithmetical abilities, many teachers have been displaced from a balance of “mind-body.” You can give high priority in your instructional aims and behaviors to helping students keep that balance. They will refine it by attention to the territory where intense feelings—including powerful kinesthetic responses—and imaginative, rigorous reflection mutually nourish each other. Thus, besides wanting to exemplify the usefulness of such interplay, in my instruction I include kinetic activity, related precepts, and discussion of that mind-body balance.

By "kinetic" I mean actual movement, and by "kinesthetic" I mean the imagery of movement, whether or not made manifest. While guiding such activities, body language is important. For example, whenever I face a class, move and ask them to imitate me, I close my eyes to minimize their self-consciousness and demonstrate my freedom from evaluating them on the spot. Those who will take part, will; those who won't, won't. Bless and release

SUPPLEMENTING TRADITIONAL TESTS

When you want to measure student's abilities, two unconventional kinds of tests are useful in addition to conventional ones: "anonymous tests" let you assess how the class as a whole is progressing, in the light of your evaluative process and timing. Such tests minimize fear and let each student measure personal progress. "Non-quantified tests" can measure activities beyond quantification (e.g., analytical critical statements comparing two performances of the same piece). Such statements can be honestly judged only by their cogency and evidence of genuine engagement. Unlike anonymous tests, students write their names on non-quantified tests before giving them to me. I note in my records either the mere fact that a student took part in the test, or at most evaluate them intuitively by separating the mean from the extremes—plus, check, or minus—and let the students know that such a mark can help push a borderline final grade up or down. With both these kinds of unconventional tests, I always allow time to give my answers and encourage related discussion. I've often been impressed by students' intense involvement throughout a session when I give an anonymous or non-quantified test.

"HISTORY" VS. "MERE CHRONICLE"

Dare I confess that "history" in the title of a course bothers me? It seems often to mean mere chronicle—a whirlwind tour in which nobody lives more than two pages. When planning instruction with a historical component, consider history as a verb, as "historying," as paying attention both to diachronic relationships (environments prior to and succeeding that of the topic under consideration), and to synchronic relationships (the contemporaneous environment). Let the topic be the *comparison* of two successive major styles, and the comparison of both with recent styles. Doing so will awaken historical appetite, related abilities and fruitful attitudes in your students far better than the chronological survey grouted into place. Even

MUSIC LISTENING

if it doesn't eliminate instructional difficulty, at least it substitutes one that is more rewarding. Chronological succession can become merely an important topic, rather than the backbone of the course.

FLEXIBILITY IN CHOOSING REPERTORIES

When someone desires to experience a particular kind of music and to be a "qualified listener" in regard to it, view that desire as an inner—often unconscious or at least pre-rational—urgency to explore a part of the Self resonating to those sounds. Remember to consider Selfhood as a paradoxical blend of uniqueness and pan-human nature. If you want rapport with students, acknowledge: a) that a piece—whatever the repertory—may not speak to that inner urgency in a particular student; and b) that if your aims as a teacher are partly independent of the question of repertory, it's useful to remain free of the trap of debating the issue. Find pieces from a repertory, in good spirit, that evoke positive responses in you and some of your students. If you don't, that may be the end of everything but resentment, fear, and frustration between you and them.

Many gifted young adults resonate instantly to certain pieces from the classical repertory. Among those pieces are some of the most sublime—music I personally had to wait for when I was a young adult, until I was older (more experienced? more open?). Other students seem to find pieces from that repertory useless, even offensive.

Accept that life-enhancing values in the classical repertory become more vivid when presented in a broader context of global music—one reason why it is irresponsible to presume that the classical repertory is the most or only important one and therefore to pay attention only to it.

Pan-human urgencies can strike anywhere: the Himalayan peaks of classical masterpieces from Gregorian Chant through Stravinsky wipe out neither the foothills of vernacular music—from Annie Laurie to today's Top Forty, from the Bauls of Bengal to the Ba-Benzélé pygmies—nor the active volcanoes of Carter and Boulez. It is tempting to want only to introduce students to those peaks from the classical repertory. But by incorporating study of those masterpieces into a broader context you can lead them towards inner awareness of their uniqueness and pan-humanity, and to encourage them to let such awareness influence their behavior and attitudes.

Comment: Leonard Meyer's phrase "qualified listener" refers to someone who has "internalized the probabilities" of a style, thus becoming ready to predict what is likely to happen in music that embodies the style. Such predicting can intensify responses, both when music magnificently

fulfills the prediction and when it delights with unexpectedly right deviations. Although a naive listener can respond to the numinous even in unfamiliar music, internalizing those probabilities enables remembering and anticipating, discriminating and valuing. Surprisingly enough, one can become a qualified listener, or better, an *artistic* listener, without formal instruction!

MAKING ROOM FOR OTHER REPERTORIES

It is possible to miniaturize without trivializing our rich heritage of classical music, that luxurious peninsula in the world of music. If, as I hope, you want to include a modicum of study of one or more other repertoires—post-1950 radically innovative music, popular music, jazz, world folk music, and Asian concert music—consider the following ways to begin finding space in the schedule for such study:

a. Make a list of genres in classical music that you believe will offer the most value for long-range growth in your students—for example, the sonata cycle (solo sonatas, through nonets, to symphonies); fugue; concerto; “descriptive” or “program music”; solo songs for recitals, for the theater, for worship; choral songs for worship, for concerts, for the theater; musical theater, including but not limited to opera. (In this particular item, to enhance continuity, I have placed all comments at the end.)

Comment: Nomenclature for repertoires, genres, and periods is notoriously ambiguous. By “classical” music, in this present context, I mean the repertory conventionally considered in courses in the history of music, from Gregorian Chant to Igor Stravinsky, that is, to about 1950. The term “concert music” appeals to some. I object strongly to the well-entrenched term “art music,” with its damaging connotations of innate superiority both to “folk” music and “popular” music as well as to Asian and African “concert” music. If you believe it is indeed superior, then let debate on the matter become part of your instruction, partly to demonstrate that such a belief is merely your choice. By “genre,” I mean the name for groups of pieces having sufficient family resemblance, either in form or technique or both, and in function, for us to identify the group with a common name. I do not include period style as an essential feature of a genre: for example, “concerto” is a genre; “baroque concerto” is a sub-division of the genre.

b. Choose pairs of pieces from each genre you study: one piece from the twentieth century and one from an earlier century. Be sure ultimately to include all the periods in your choices. Let your instruction emphasize

MUSIC LISTENING

relations between: a) the two pieces of each pair; and b) each piece and its cultural context.

Comment: A textbook by Cannon, Johnson, and Waite, *The Art of Music*, offers wonderful information. It was written for a Yale undergraduate introductory course in music and is now regrettably out of print. The authors develop each period, first of all, around its prevailing philosophical view of reality and of what it is to be human, then describe the role music has in such a context, and finally present a detailed stylistic analysis of no more than two pieces. Such historical information focuses on deeper matters than the usual mere political and economic factors, becoming more attractive for students who want to apply historical perspective to enhance the quality of their lives.

c. Require students to develop close acquaintance with a designated group of pieces from the list. Remind them that they can only develop close acquaintance by repeated listening with focussed attention—"what's that, teacher?". Encourage them to be open to qualities of feeling and empathic time-patterning. Devise ways to test for that close acquaintance. In such a clarified, broadened context a more demanding variant of "drop-the-needle" may even be useful; a sample item: "Does the following recorded excerpt from the Eroica Symphony, first movement, come from near the beginning, middle, or end?"

Comment: If, as I hope, the value of close acquaintance in itself has high priority in your aims, then be prepared to sacrifice some breadth of coverage and depth of detail elsewhere. (Throw away the image of "If it's Tuesday, it must be Wagner.") If there are two pieces from each genre you study, one from the twentieth and one from another century, perhaps pay attention in class sessions to only one and assign the other for close acquaintance; or pay attention to both in class and ignore another topic. During instructional listening, consider the following: a) delay identification of any kind at least until after the first hearing, seeking a *tabula rasa*—as neutral a cultural filter as possible; b) announce the clock-time of the experience—distinguishing that kind of time from psychologically-sociologically relative musical time; c) present some personally refined variant of: "if you feel comfortable doing so, close your eyes to give up visual territory and focus your aural awareness"—if you ask this, never monitor it!; and d) insist on silence; their environment has probably conditioned them to feel free to make random noise. They are often unaware of it.

d. As an intermittent topic of the course, like a leitmotif, include a chart laid out for the main periods of the history of music, covering vital aspects of both sonic and environmental features of each period. During class

JOURNAL OF MUSIC THEORY PEDAGOGY

sessions, have the students gradually fill in the chart as you present information and lead discussion about it.

Comment: Chronology thus becomes merely an important topic rather than the basis of the course, opening up room for more important matters. You can count on surprisingly improved results if, rather than always the *exact* year of a historically significant item, you require them to remember the following or some personally acceptable variant: which century until the 15th, which half century from the 16th through 18th, which quarter century through 1950, and which decade from 1950 until the present.

e. From your list of classical genres, require students to choose additional pieces to become closely acquainted with, and to begin understanding their sonic and environmental elements. Make sure they make their own choices.

f. Let such a curricular plan, as personally refined, open up room both for attention to one or more other repertoires and for studying selected pieces intensively.

REVISED USAGE OF TRADITIONAL TERMS

a. A definition of music:

Let "sound" be a neutral term, leading to the psychologically and sociologically influenced terms "noise" and "music." Noise is undesired sound. Music is desired sound. This revised definition of music, substituting for an inherited absolute, revealed definition, ignores questions of value, of what makes *good/bad* music. It can help sidestep useless debate with students: "Mozart/Heavy-metal rock is/isn't even music." It can lead also to heightened awareness of the role of an artistic listener as "vicarious co-constructor." I take seriously such a dictum as the Balinese "We have no art; we do everything the best we can" and its Cage-ian heritage. Outside our EuroAmerican-Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian view there are alternate views of reality which don't distinguish between sacred and secular, serious and playful, work and play, so does the Balinese-Cage language offer an intriguing approach to life: all words *can be* poetry; all sound *can be* music; all movement *can be* dance.

b. A definition of musical elements:

Distinguish between "sonic" and "environmental" elements. Sonic elements are: duration, pitch, timbre, and volume, each existing in psychosociologically influenced musical time. Such terms as rhythm, melody,

MUSIC LISTENING

harmony, form, often called elements, refer to *complexes* of sonic elements. Environmental elements are: where, when, and why the musical sounds, the musical events occur, and who is involved in them. True connoisseurs of a style pay attention to both kinds of elements.

A DEFINITION OF MUSICAL ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Reflecting on one's responses to music means analyzing and evaluating them. Analyzing means: discovering and documenting relations between sonic and environmental elements as sources for (a) emotive responses, (b) time-patterning responses, and (c) clues to cultural meaning. Evaluating means: negatively or positively valuing both an experience and its agent, in the light of personal and shared preferences. Such preferences are at work whether or not they lead eventually to systematic, refined norms. Some people evaluate judgmentally—"X is good, Y is bad"; "X is better/worse than Y"—while others evaluate preferentially—"I like/dislike X"; "I prefer X to Y." Evaluations stem, consciously or not, from hypotheses about the nature of reality, specifically about human nature and the role of the arts.

A DEFINITION OF MUSICAL FORM

When listening to music one is experiencing its process, its movement and growth; afterwards, when reflecting on the experience, one is contemplating, in memory, the shape of the music. Instructionally, this two-fold distinction between *experiencing* movement/growth/process and, when the music is finished, *configuring* the shape of that experience, is more useful than the single inherited term, "form." For example, such a designator as "ABA" speaks only to recollected shape as defined by presentation, digression, and recurrence. When used alone, ABA and its variants are inadequate for instruction. The difference between listening and reflecting is analogous to the difference between standing in a river and viewing the river from a hilltop. Find ways to help students refine both kinds of experience.

A DEFINITION OF MUSIC-HISTORICAL PROCESS

Consider our EuroAmerican musical heritage as a series of stylistic cycles, each having three phases: primitive, classic, and luxuriant-decadent.

Each primitive phase overlaps with its luxuriant-decadent predecessor. Cycles cluster with their neighbors to make a "macro-cycle." Macro-cycles cluster with their neighbors to make a "mega-cycle." For example, Medieval through late baroque is a macro-cycle; Viennese classic through about 1950, is another; and all the way from Medieval through about 1950 is a mega-cycle. We are in a "mega-overlap" unprecedentedly long in regard to music and even longer in regard to general culture.

A DEFINITION OF INSTRUMENTAL FAMILIES

The following global names are derived from the sound-generating mode of instruments. They are applicable anywhere in world music, offering ways to remember and anticipate, and minimizing fear of the unnamed:

CHORDOPHONE: stretched strings with a resonator, either plucked, struck, or bowed.

MEMBRANOPHONE: stretched membrane with a resonator.

AEROPHONE: a vibrating column of air.

IDIOPHONE: a vibrating unstretched substance.

ELECTROPHONE: vibrating electrical waves.

Comment: Recognizing and identifying instruments become more useful when one then attends to their effect on time-patterning and emotive responses, and how they become metaphors for cultural meaning.

A DEFINITION OF MELODIC TYPES

Some melodies evoke a kinesthetic image in me. The image can have strong gestic qualities, either with a sense of locomotion—for example, such dancelike motion as soaring, whirling, stomping, leaping—or without that sense—for example, facial and arm/hand motion associated with pleading, threatening, blessing, imploring. I call such melodies "gestic" because of the nature of my imagery of dancelike or strongly emotional gestures.

Other melodies evoke an image of singing in me. Such singing can include a sense of body motion, as in dancelike tunes, or evoke absolute, weightless quietude, as in Gregorian chant, Renaissance masses and motets, and certain Adagio movements in Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and the best of their inheritors. When the lyric image has strong symmetries with considerable melodic rhyme, I call such melodies "tunes." When the image has complex interplay of long and short parts, and many different dura-

MUSIC LISTENING

tions, as in certain slow movements by Bach, I refer to them as “continuous-flow” melodies.

Comment: I ask myself: “how would my body move to this music if I were free of self-consciousness and physical limitations?” “How would such movement reflect and awaken emotion?” “How would such an emotion reflect personal and communal values?” Formulating these questions has been helpful in broadening and intensifying my response to music of Webern, Boulez, Varèse, and Messiaen, among others, and to that of Asia and Africa. When I listen to music in an unfamiliar style, instead of my earlier tendency to rebel and deny—“There’s no melody; there’s no rhythm!”—I now consciously seek kinesthetic resonance and often experience it. (No guarantee I’ll like it!) This different approach has intensified my critical discrimination: my *body*, trustworthy in this matter, says “Yes!” or “No!” to music, either in itself or in a particular performance or both. Most important, attending to those three questions offers me a sense that I’m closely in touch with the reason-for-being of aesthetic experience, influencing both my personal life and my instructional attitudes and behaviors.

A DEFINITION OF MUSICAL RHYTHM

Musical rhythm is a human response to sound-as-music. Since everything in the universe has rhythm, the frequently heard term “no rhythm” has no meaning. “Free rhythm” speaks to a response to complex durations, typically having fractional proportions; “pulsed rhythm” speaks to a response to durations having simpler, typically integral proportions but without short-range cyclic grouping by accent; “metric rhythm” speaks to a response to pulsed durations that also have short-range grouping by accent. Metric notation is not synonymous with a metric response in a qualified/artistic listener, since metric notation can also account for free rhythms. Proportionate durations, whether notated or heard, free, pulsed, or metric, are not yet “rhythm.” Only when a listener responds by experiencing the pattern produced by durations is rhythm born. Short-range rhythms group into mid-range and ultimately long-range rhythms.

A DEFINITION OF MUSICAL PACE

Once we experience a musical gesture, its duration can serve for comparison with that of succeeding gestures. When those gestures embody, within a continuing single tempo, durations longer or shorter than the original, the pace of the music has changed. Although changes of pace occur

with beautiful effect in music before Haydn, they first appeared systematically in the service of dramatic aims in Viennese High Classic music, both instrumental and vocal. Frequent change of pace continues until about 1950 as one of many links with that earlier style.

Comment: It is in regard to musical pace that I recall Leibnitz's "Music is a secret exercise in arithmetic of the soul, unaware of its own act of counting." That frame helps me pay attention to the extraordinary vivid experience of, for instance, "riding eight-ness." My conscious involvement in such an image helps prolong the moment of contemplation and "famines my appetite" for re-hearing the music. Therefore, I make sure to include, for my students, related experiences along with the concept.

A DEFINITION OF MUSICAL LISTENING

There are four intermingled aspects: while listening, a) a pre-rational response to qualities of movement and sound in the music; b) a blending of the pre-rational response with conscious but pre-verbal tracking of the time-patterning responses, paying attention to the qualities and durations of imagined movement in the body in response to the music; c) paying attention to the emotional, the spiritual energy such imaged movement both awakens and reflects; and afterwards, d) reflection on relations between the musical response and a value system, with its resulting way of life among members of a cultural group, based on their psychologically-sociologically relative definition of the nature of reality. Such reflection can lead to insights into one's own Selfhood, and to integration of those insights in support of mutually confirming I-Thou dialogue.

I offer these suggestions hopefully. Whether they are directly useful or not pales in significance for me beside the possibility that they might serve as raw material for reflection and even debate. Sir Francis Bacon hit the mark in the early seventeenth century—I paraphrase—"Read not to accept or refute, but to weigh and consider."