

Analyzing for Meaning

Josh Chodoroff, Highland Park High School – jchodoroff@dist113.org

Matt Temple, New Trier High School – templem@newtrier.k12.il.us

January 26, 2017

A thorough analysis that is taught with intent can deepen student comprehension of content material, foster musical independence, and lead to meaningful and outstanding performances.

Does your analysis foster...

1. Technical excellence – Can your students play the correct notes and rhythms at the correct time with good intonation, balance, blend, etc.? (Most music educators spend a lot of time here and get quite good at this.)
2. Artistic authenticity – Is the style of the performance consistent with the composer's time period and intent? A Stravinsky staccato is very different from a Mozart staccato!
3. Aesthetic impact
 - Did your analysis help you as the conductor develop a point of view about how the music should *feel*? What are descriptive words that describe the atmosphere(s) presented in the piece?
 - Where is the ultimate climax of the piece? How does the piece move towards and away from that moment?
 - Can you make informed decisions about what elements to highlight in performance? Where is the important melodic material at any given moment?
4. Independent musicianship
 - What concepts in this piece are transferable to other music?
 - Did you uncover strong learning outcomes for your students?
 - How can you connect your students to the music?
 - Can students not only describe *what* they are doing, but *why* they are doing it? For example – “Even though my music is marked forte, I’m playing a little bit softer because I don’t have the melody...the clarinets do.”

The Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) Method

- Notice – Label – Speculate
- Speculating vs. Labeling - In our music theory classes, most of us really didn't do “theory”, which would have involved speculating and drawing conclusions from the evidence. What we did was really just *labeling*. Labeling is important but it doesn't generate excitement or interpretations. For that, we need to speculate. To train ourselves to ask the big question: Why?¹

What Am I Looking For?

You have to collect lots of unrelated facts and ideas about your piece and its composer before you know what will be useful. Start jotting down notes and hopping from score to webpage to book and back. Even though not everything you discover will be useful right now, it still becomes part of your own musical education—making you a broader thinker, helping you to draw connections you hadn't previously seen in lots of other pieces, and giving you more general background as a professional musician and educator.¹

The Two Parts of the Investigation:

1. Background Information (music history)
 - Historical implications
 - Biographical information about the composer
 - Cultural underpinnings
2. Elements of Music (music theory)
 - Form – how is the piece organized?
 - Rhythm – are there unifying rhythms that characterize the piece?
 - Melody – what is the melodic contour? What are the phrase lengths?
 - Harmony – what is the mode of the piece? How is dissonance used (or not)?
 - Timbre – why does the composer choose certain instruments at certain times?
 - Texture – how do the instruments playing relate to one another?
 - Thick vs. thin (number of voices playing simultaneously)
 - Organization of voices (monophonic, polyphonic, homophonic)
 - Expressive Qualities (dynamics, articulations, and tempo) – why are they there, and when are they changed?

Advice

- Start by decoding the title
- Be a curator of the important background information; prioritize what is important
- Study the elements of music in any order
- Remember to speculate...ask WHY!
- Note what students should learn
- Note what the audience should hear and feel

Think BIG Picture

- Comprehension is necessary for artistry! The more we as educators reveal about a piece to our students, the more connected our students will be with the music. True artistry requires more than just technical proficiency.
- A quality process will lead to a quality product! The vast majority of our time with our students is spent in rehearsal...not performance. In addition to rehearsing repertoire, this time can be used to intentionally teach and scaffold transferrable musical concepts.
- The repertoire we choose should provide both a meaningful artistic experience AND a way to expand a student's individual musicianship

Resources & Acknowledgements

- *Shaping Sound Musicians* – Patricia O'Toole
- <http://illinoiscmp.weebly.com/>
 - CMP Workshop at NIU – July 17 - 21
- Special thanks to the Illinois Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance Committee: Paulette Boddy, Rob Buckley, Josh Chodoroff, Mary Lynn Doherty, Jason Flaks, Judy Hays, Andy Jeffrey, Mike Kasper, Jeremy Little, Ray Ostwald, Bill Rank, Mona Roy, Melissa Schoonover, Matt Temple, Beth Wood

¹ Special thanks to Randy Swiggum for use of his “CMP at a Glance” sheets