New Music Major Seminar
(2002 and following: N.B. some hyperlinks may not remain current)
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Overview

Becoming self-reliant and independently creative in music is not a random occurrence; neither does it happen simply because one plays an instrument for a long time. Those students who become seasoned professional musicians give hours of thought and planning to their careers and their musicianship along the road to artistic achievement. Although individuality creates many unique paths toward excellence in music, one can state with certainty that certain habits and attitudes simply will never yield success. It is appropriate, then, to ask at the outset: “What is music performance? What does it require for success?” At its most basic, music performance requires two things: discipline, and curiosity. No artist can succeed in expressive creation or interpretation without these two qualities. These two qualities relate between themselves as well: one must learn to recognize those occasions when discipline needs to limit curiosity, and those other times when curiosity needs to dilute discipline. Understanding these points, one can progress to a broader discussion of each of the two main points.

Discipline relates to both the technical and creative aspects of music. It exists most clearly in the fact that, as a performer, every musical statement one makes derives directly from muscular actions that are controlled by the brain. Too often music students believe that rote repetition alone will ultimately result in a learned piece. While repetition does tend to imprint actions on the brain, the polar opposite is necessary for consistent success: the brain must imprint commands upon the muscles. Muscles will make no action at all without direction first from the brain. Even in rote repetition the brain issues commands to the muscles, only it issues those commands more passively. As it receives signals from the already active muscles, it sends somewhat vague messages back to continue doing the same actions. It should be quite obvious that messages sent under these conditions often overlook minute technical or musical errors that can rise up in concert and ruin a passage through a disastrous error or simply through a dull rendition.
If, however, the performer has consistently disciplined him/herself while practicing to keep the brain as the origin of commands rather than the muscles, then even in performance the discipline will remain in the form of an active, directing brain. The muscles, which need only to follow commands, become accustomed to responding quickly, and they follow the commands in performance as they did in the practice session. In fact the muscles should never issue commands, only signals that the brain interprets, such as “This shift was executed correctly,” or “That vibrato was insufficient, command me to do more next time,” or “I am beginning to hurt, stop practicing.”

This discipline of which we are speaking may be equated with the discipline needed to be an all-star athlete. Athletes work out, train, shave milliseconds off their running time, hone their curve balls, and constantly chip away at the edge of their limitations. An extra two hundredths of a second can win a race. One extra “ace” can win a tennis match. Consistent precision is everything, and their careers, images, and self-satisfaction rest on their ability to command their muscles under pressure to do all the amazing things they commanded them to do in the practice workout.

In music it is no different. Although the feeling has evolved over time that it is sufficient to try, and any level of music is acceptable to most people, in fact the reality is that in music the general public desires and expects the same kind of perfection as it does in sports. In the arts, however, the competition exists not between opposing people, as in sports, but between performer and composition. The “winner” is the one who most fully recognizes the artistic potential that is within the composition, rising to high levels of expression and accuracy. The expression comes in part as a result of curiosity, and in part as a result of discipline: hours of thought and rigorous demands in the practice session train the brain to issue clear commands to the muscles, which in turn become trained to respond, so that under concert pressure they will obey. They must obey the brain, even if, in the spontaneity of the moment, the brain explores a curious new interpretation and issues a new command to the muscles.

In summary, discipline is similar to athletic training. It is an imposed state of mind in which the brain becomes aware of and then controls all muscle motions whether they are done once or repeated for consistency. Any practice time that does not maintain brain control is essentially wasted.

Curiosity, the other basic component of music performance, also involves the brain, although its main residence is in the soul. A successful musician must be able to feel a nagging need to try a phrase or technique in a different way than has been tried up until then simply to “hear what it sounds like, see what it looks like, or know what it feels like.” Without this curiosity, the discipline will always act upon a finite number of commands, a finite amount of information. Curiosity is what expands the store of information, thus augmenting the variety of commands and resulting in unique interpretations. Curiosity can be applied to the personal aspects of performance: “Can I feel this note more powerfully; can I make a different portamento here that touches me more deeply and therefore make the piece ‘mine’ more; what happens if I play this phrase more slowly, or end it more slowly, or end it with a different timbre, or peak on a different note; how much sound can I get out of my violin, or how little without losing quality; how quickly can I discipline my fingers to move?”

Curiosity, in order to be complete, however, must also be applied to the extra-personal aspects of performance: “Where can I find more about Beethoven’s style so that when I play it sounds more like Beethoven; how did performers play staccato marks in Beethoven’s time differently from the present; will the interpretation I am planning work in the hall where I will play it; if I play the rhythms more markedly in this one passage, will that bring the performance closer to the composer’s style, or does this passage need to be more sostenuto; what is not convincing about this interpretation as it is now being played?”

In order for curiosity to be complete, therefore, there must be a combination of both one’s knowledge of musical style (acquired in part when one’s curiosity drives one to study style), and one’s participation in the soul of the composer as a creative living individual.

As curiosity and discipline work together, influence each other, and coordinate both thought and muscle actions, the process of refinement gains momentum. Through experiments with technique and musicianship one acquires an increasingly deep conviction about one’s ideas, one feels qualified and
compelled to talk about them, and ultimately to present them to the public through performance. At the time of the performance, all of the informed decisions that were made alone in the practice room and all of the commands that were repeated enough times to guarantee the brain’s control in the concert will return to support one last creative question: “Can I do it better in the concert than I did in the practice room?” Provided one has a thorough awareness of technique and style; provided one is, prior to the concert, in control of both the instrument and the repertoire, the concert can become that most marvelous of occasions: an opportunity to offer a première interpretation, one that is born of the immediate moment and that is given freely to the performer and any participating member of the audience. At that one moment discipline and curiosity fuse and the result is artistry.

As the great pedagogue Carl Flesch eloquently stated: “One demand may be acknowledged as a fundamental law: A perfect technique consists in producing all tones with purity of intonation, tonal beauty, and with the shadings and rhythm as required by the composer. Every technical error, without exception, offends this fundamental law or one of its parts.” To live within the boundaries of this law as a musician requires exceptional discipline and unceasing curiosity.

Following from the above discussion, here is a chain of questions that will lead to greater awareness of what is happening in a practice session, stronger brain command control, and a wider sense of curiosity.

For any piece, passage of a piece, technique, or exercise, the following chain of questions can be asked following a run-through of the passage:

- Was that performance good? (Yes or No)
- Can I play it better than I just did? (Almost always Yes)
  - What was imperfect or unconvincing about it?
    (e.g. a shift was out of tune or timed poorly; I ran out of bow prior to the end of a note or phrase; dynamics were too bland or wrong; I missed an articulation or accent; the rhythms were not even or consistent; I could shape the phrase more beautifully. . . .)
  - How can I improve that discovered imperfection?
    (e.g. practice smooth shifts that are similar to and include the missed shift; command the muscles to play more evenly for ten times in a row; listen to the tone projection more carefully next time; take fifteen to thirty minutes and work on a specific technique outside the realm of the piece I am playing, then use that technique in its improved form in the piece; study the composer’s style through books, scores, and recordings more thoroughly. . . .)

After asking these questions, practice your discovery, continuing to ask questions about it until you have reached a level of consistency that brings the piece, passage or exercise to a new level of quality. Repeat these questions for every subsequent practice or performance of the excerpt.
Preparing for Academic Success

1. Budget your time for reading, listening research so that you do not require long sessions where you try to learn more than you can remember.
2. Pop quiz yourself on what you have learned frequently.
3. Use your time walking between classes or buildings to review what you already know.
4. Long term memory works only after you have prompted it over and over with short-term memory trials (pop quizzes).
5. Take careful class notes. The more detail you take down during the hour you are in class the easier it will be to remember later. Consider taking paragraph notes – pretend you are the teacher and will need your notes to lecture to a future class (you just might!)
6. Listen to materials to be covered in class at least once BEFORE that class. Then when the professor discusses that piece it will have an initial familiarity for you.
7. People learn most when they are curious about something. Find ways to be curious about your subjects. Often the easiest and most obvious way to do this is to do a little extra research over what the instructor requires. Read an article or part of one in New Groves Dictionary, for example.
8. Studying and practice are your JOB right now until you find a paying job in your field. Allot adequate time to do your job well. Do not relegate your job to “after hours” last minute work.

Aim high your first year!
- Attitude and goal-setting affects your success in academics.
- Establish good study habits during your first semester.

It helps to study in groups.
- Choose study mates who will help you be successful.

Music history/theory:
- Get ready to listen and write!
- Take advantage of your English classes – learn to write formally.
- Familiarize yourself with the library to make research go more quickly.
- Again, study in groups!

Music Academic Study:

http://www.unc.edu/depts/unc_caps/TenTraps.html
http://homeworktips.about.com/library/weekly/aa110697.htm
http://www3.uakron.edu/law/admissions/studyhabits.html
http://www.corridor.net/RecorderMusic/studio3.htm
http://www.intstudy.com/articles/ec192a11.htm
Practicing

Practicing is an art in itself. It can be refined to become a highly efficient, useful, and rewarding part of a musician’s day, at which point it involves much more than time spent with an instrument in a small room repeating music until it becomes better. Practicing, at its most fundamental, requires the musician to progress sensibly from the mastery of simple problems to more complex ones. Complex problems are almost always combinations of several simpler ones, thus making the simple problems of first priority for mastery. Some guidelines follow which, if internalized, will elevate practice to an amazingly productive and gratifying experience.

1) In all practice, always keep a strong pulse inside you that will govern the timing of your rhythms and phrases. If you have not yet acquired the skill to feel a pulse while concentrating on a musical passage, use your practice time to ingrain that ability into yourself.

Students at the sophomore level of college should be responsible for learning most of the correct rhythms and bowings and fingerings on their own. That leaves lesson time for growth in the area of tone quality, pitch center, and interpretation, and the occasional correction of bowing and fingering as needed. Lessons spent correcting too high a percentage of notes are an indicator that the students have not spent enough time sitting down with the piece and studying it, analyzing it, learning it so that their brains know the piece. Only then can they expect their brains to tell their fingers what to do.

Music is, at some level, very logical: the eyes look at some notes and get them into the ears correctly. Over time the brain acquires ownership of the aural signals the ears are sending it. It then commands the fingers and arms to move so that they recreate the sounds the ears heard in the first place. During this process, musicians educate their ears by learning the correct styles for certain composers in certain eras, and they open up their hearts and souls to add a little of themselves to the stylistically correct interpretation -- that makes their interpretation personal, entirely their own.

As students progress through college, the professor’s job moves from being a teacher who tells the student nearly everything to being a teacher who asks students questions and gets them to make their own informed decisions about the music they are playing.

Students must quickly acquire the discipline to learn pieces correctly from the beginning and study them as they go. They need to remember that their ultimate goal is to sound professional; it is not always necessary for most pieces to sound “like the recording” (i.e. e. professional) in two days or one week. Students must acquire the patience to learn music in incremental steps, mastering the technique, learning the phrase shapes, hearing the direction of the movement, and gaining consistency of playing. By learning slowly they also allow themselves a greater likelihood that what they learn they will also retain.

Therefore:

1. Practice one thing at a time.

2. Practice everything you do (from repertoire to scales) so that your performance will ultimately move a listener.

3. Return to “quiz” yourself on passages you have already practiced earlier in the session. Ask, “Can I play this correctly and beautifully the first time I try?” If you can, over five different “quizzes” then you may be acquiring ownership of that passage. If you cannot, then that passage needs more practice.

4. In every attempt at every passage, pay attention to your tone, intonation, tempo, style, rhythmic steadiness, artistic expression, force of your musical conviction.
5. Musical conviction becomes artistic and consistent only through a combination of constant work and inspiration (discipline and curiosity). BOTH must be present for ultimate success.

6. Practice to pull the most possible sound (in both piano and forte) out of your instrument at all times. Wimpy playing is of no use to anyone. Make every particle of air inside your instrument vibrate. Get to know your instrument as intimately as you know your family. It is your first “relationship” on a day-to-day basis.

Practicing and Performing Music:

http://www.speech.kth.se/music/performance/

http://www.engr.unl.edu/eeshop/anxiety.html

http://www.speech.kth.se/music/performance/


Preparing for Practice Success

1. Practice at your best time of day: when you are physically and emotionally at your peak.
2. Allow more than 15 minutes for most practice sessions. A good session begins with a warm-up of several minutes followed by technical practice and practice on artistic aspects or musicianship.
3. Practice is for the following purposes: to ensure that the ONE TIME you have to perform a piece publicly EVERYTHING goes as you intend. CONSISTENCY is key in both technical and musical terms. The most efficient way to be consistent is to practice small sections over and over until your mind remembers how to achieve success and your muscles remember what to do when your brain gives them a direction.
4. Most practice time should NOT be spent playing or singing though a piece. This is not efficient practice unless one is near a recital/performance, when one should practice run-throughs to see how they go.
5. Do not skip days if at all possible. If practice is all about training your mind to remember a specific thought process and about training your muscles to follow those specific brain commands, then if you practice for 1 hour and do not repeat those commands again for 24-48 hours, your brain and muscles have too much time to forget what you worked on the last session. Thus, the best practice is careful, thoughtful, frequent, designed to achieve specific goals and to remember them.
6. Be willing to change your practice habits from those you found successful in high school.
7. Set goals for yourself while practicing, but setting unrealistic goals geared towards quantity rather than quality may leave you unhappy after your lessons.
8. Over learn your materials
9. Learn how to manage your time properly with respect to academics.
10. Learn to not procrastinate.
11. Use your instructors as resources and trust their opinion until you develop your own opinions based upon your own research and development.
How to Maximize the Learning from a Lesson

1) Warm up your mind immediately prior to the lesson. It is crucial that you remain alert during lessons, hearing what is being said, and interpreting the suggestions into advice in your own words that you can use during the following week to improve your overall playing.

2) Warm up your fingers and muscles immediately prior to the lesson. Mistakes will always happen to any musician who plays “cold.” The professor who hears those mistakes will stop you to correct them, wasting time that could have been spent fixing problems of a more pervasive nature than simply lack of warm-up.

3) Relate all specific suggestions by the professor both to the specific passage and also to your musicianship in general. As the violinist Joseph Silverstein said on more than one occasion, “One should learn repertoire not merely to be able to play that particular piece, but to improve one’s ability to play the instrument through learning the piece.” It is most likely that any given technical or musical hurdle will apply to more than one instance. As you are taught how to master any one technical or musical obstacle, practice it out of context so that you will know how to apply your improved playing to any future piece.

4) Do not allow the intensity or standards of the professor to intimidate you during a lesson. When I was a student, friends spoke freely of their nervousness in lessons. As a professor, I ask students often if they are nervous, and frequently hear affirmative answers. The desire to impress is natural in humans, and the worry of insufficient preparation heightens the stress. In short, however, too much stress and worry reduce students' performing abilities and allow errors to occur that should not happen. Remember that in most cases the professor is there to hold out a standard for students to reach, and to illuminate the most efficient path toward the achievement of that standard. [This discussion does not take into account the occasional “bad day” that everyone has.] Students should work hard to replace “lesson fear” with a more constructive sense of “heightened alertness.” With greater alertness, students will focus more fully on the demands of their performance tasks, thus avoiding the fear of criticism, and creating simultaneously a simulation of the concert stage, where alertness will aid success, and nerves will contribute to disaster.

5) Ask questions of the professor and of yourself during lessons. Both technique and musicianship consist of more than simple directives. Every action or decision can involve the question, “Why?” While it may not always be appropriate to ask, “Why?” to every suggestion, students who blindly accept all their professor offers and practice it on no stronger foundation than a rote command, usually progress more slowly than students who understand the background to their development. Students who know why a modification of technique will improve their playing are more able to transfer the technique to other applications in future repertoire.

6) Consider lessons to be trial performances as you approach performance dates. A performance, one hopes, will be a situation in which few people offer criticism, and the only remarks other than high praise are collegial discussions of alternative interpretations. Lessons on this level require students to spend their daily practice learning the technique and style of performance so well that the professor must cover new ground in each lesson. The least effective lesson is one in which the professor repeats material that has been covered numerous times before. Students who coast through a practice week without actively thinking about their learning process during their practice hours usually repeat previous bad habits, forcing the professor to repeat again and again the correct way to play. Such lessons waste time and ultimately frustrate both professor and student.

7) Be creative and be bold enough to take some risks. Most professor have some degree of creativity in them as performers, and what they most hope to spark in their students is a new personal expression, one that is refined, exhibits good taste, and catches the student performer up in the
passion and charm of the creative effort to the extent that it also catches up the listener. To some
degree, refinement and good taste can be acquired objectively; however, they simply cannot
mature without some amount of that magic ingredient: personal involvement. A closed-up soul
will never capture the imagination of an audience; at best it will only capture the audience’s
sympathy. Students need to practice the sense of risky abandonment that creates the magic
ingredient of involvement, beginning in the practice room as they “play to the walls,” and then
also in the studio. As they “stretch their artistic wings” in the lesson, the professor can provide
feedback that helps the students refine their artistry, cutting back on the places that are overplayed
and adding more to the weaker sections.
Preparing for a Performance

To continue the metaphor of the athlete, a performance is similar in many ways to a track or gymnastics competition. All eyes are on the performer, who has only one try to get the performance correct. The hearts of the audience will go out to those performers, who like the great athletes, bring the observer to a new height of awareness, to a heightened sense of experience. The performer must therefore reach inside him/herself and find that extra reserve of purpose to accomplish the task and he/she must be fully aware of the uniqueness of the task of performing. Musicians who simply “do the job” are of little value to the art of music. While they may be employed and making a living, it is the aspiration to greatness in that moment of performance that separates the artists in music from the practitioners.

Achieving that rare sense of greatness comes from talent, diligent practice, constant study of music, and at the end, knowing how to prepare oneself mentally and spiritually for a performance. Just as an athlete does not run or jump or do back flips without first warming up physically and then preparing mentally just prior to the event, so a musician must never walk on stage without gearing up for the unique task at hand.

The process of preparation for a truly successful concert (solo, chamber, orchestral) begins long before the concert itself. One’s early practice sessions must emphasize the demands of the concert, which are playing the pitches correctly with beautiful technique the first time and going beyond practiced playing into spontaneous creation of a living art form on the stage. So the first step toward an artistic performance is learning the part well.

Too many students cannot play a piece through consistently well. Getting it right on the third attempt is equal to a 33% rate of accuracy. Playing it correctly 3-out-of-4 times is a 75% rate of accuracy. Great artistry requires 95-98% accuracy. Even 9-out-of-10 times is not good enough. Practice playing first a single passage and later and entire piece so that from the first play-through of it until the twentieth, it is consistently correct. If one can play a piece correctly twenty times in a row, then one can begin to acquire the confidence and trust in his/her reliability to get it correct the 21st time (which might be the concert). Even one miss (19-out-of 20) is equal to a 95% rate of accuracy, which is the least allowable on a concert stage.

One achieves such a high level of consistency only by practicing each passage many times with the brain on and focused! Consistent playing only arrives when one can predict what to do to ensure success in a given passage or piece. In order to be able to predict something, one has to know and understand the requirements for making it happen. As a gymnast stands poised to do a vault, she runs over every aspect of the routine, from the runway to the jump to the spring off the horse to the speed of twist and somersault to the landing. As a successful musician prepares to walk on stage, he/she should similarly be thinking about the difficult passages and the commands necessary to complete them well, the musical passages and how to feel them deeply, and the instrument and the performer’s body and how they will relate to each other. These thoughts can never achieve the consistency needed to become predictions unless they are built into the practice routine early on.

The famed violin pedagogue Ivan Galamian mentioned that there should be three types of practice time: 1) technique practice, 2) interpretive practice, and 3) practice of performing. If a performer does not practice what one will do on stage, the stage will take him/her by surprise and the accuracy rate will dip below 95%.

Having practiced well, then, one arrives at the performance day. The bigger the event, the more special this day should be made, and yet it should be given some degree of specialness no matter how important it seems in the performer’s life. Somewhere between one and six hours prior to the performance, the musician should begin preparation. Begin by ceasing the daily activities you were involved with and consciously designate the time from “now” on as preparation time. Clear your mind and think of the music you will play. Thinking the music turns the brain’s functions on, and is equal to practicing in many ways.
(Remember that your muscles will not function without the brain first commanding them, so that if you practice the brain’s commands, you are refining your playing right then, even if your fingers are not moving.)

Eat well for your own needs prior to a concert performance. Just as a gymnast would not think of doing the floor routine after eating a steak, similarly do not perform after eating a heavy meal. The blood goes to the digestive functions and away from the brain and fingers. Eat sensibly (carbohydrates are recommended because they provide energy without taxing the digestive system) and no sooner than one-and-a-half hours before playing. Keep yourself alert before you reach the concert hall. I often find that a cup of tea provides a gentle caffeine boost that keeps me alert until adrenaline takes over.

Arrive at the performance location no later than one half hour before the concert, and if the event is an important one, then at least one hour before the concert. When you arrive, check the location of any other instruments you may need. Do you have a stand? Do you have a page turner’s chair, if needed? Is the hall set up as you anticipated? When the hall is to your specifications, then take out your instrument and play in the hall. Begin with individual notes, both short ad long. Listen to what your instrument sounds like in the hall. Get a feel for the hall itself. If you know how to use a hall’s sound, it will improve your performance. For example, if you know that a particular hall is dry, then making the tone longer and fuller on your instrument will compensate for a lack of reverberation in the hall. Similarly, a live hall will give you a boost of confidence in the size of your sound, but will also necessitate playing somewhat shorter notes, and perhaps a little more slowly in tempo to allow the sound to decay in the hall. Failure to make these adjustments may result in a less than memorable performance. Remember, though, that the audience will change the hall’s characteristics somewhat. The extra clothing and bodies will absorb vibrations and give the hall a drier feel. Be prepared for this to happen.

After you hear the hall, practice several passages that you want to keep in the front of your mind. Practice them at four speeds: slow, medium, fast and medium again. This procedure allows your brain the chance to warm up slowly to the demands of each passage, keeping it in control of your fingers at all times. Ending with a slightly slower speed leaves you with a feeling of comfort and ease about the passage that will help when the pressure of the performance arrives. You do not want to approach any passage feeling out of control and helpless.

At this point in time you should be no closer than one half hour from the concert. Now leave the stage, and in the green room, or backstage, begin the final preparations that will lead you into the rarefied space and time that is a concert. Look through and talk through each movement of each piece. Do not try to play everything because doing so will simply tire you out. Graduate your levels of energy and concentration to peak when you walk on stage, NOT before. Allow yourself to run your fingers over the difficult passages, perhaps softly and with ease in both hands. Again, if your brain commands have been carefully trained through your practice time, and your brain is ready to work during the concert, and your fingers are basically warmed up, then you do not need to work hard in the final half hour before the concert. The concert is simply your brain telling your fingers what to do and when. If you don’t know it half an hour before the performance, you won’t know it in the performance either. This final half hour is simply a time to reassure yourself of what you already know.

This last half hour is often when nerves begin to wreak havoc on even the best training and practice. An excellent performer who played each piece consistently beautifully prior to the concert can sabotage his/her concert entirely by giving in to the worry that “this time” matters so much more that everything will be different. Some performers who even bring audiences to their dress rehearsals to simulate the concert find that they do not get nervous for the dress rehearsal but do for the concert. There is something in the human mind (it comes from the ancient “fight or flight” responses) that needs to make a huge distinction between rehearsals and concerts. There is also something in humans that needs to be “liked.” Huge amounts of effort are placed on acquiring approval in our culture. The fear of the uniqueness of a performing event combined with a deep need to be liked can destroy even the best performers.
There is no “one” correct way to fight nerves and fear of performing. Each individual must master his/her mind and spirit individually. But one truth does exist to help us. When we think of how many brain commands we must do in order to be successful in a performance—for every note we must at a minimum decide where the pitch is on the instrument, how to produce the sound, what kind of vibrato to use, what dynamic to play, what articulation to use, how to create a good ensemble with any other performers on the stage, how long a note will last, where the phrase is going, how to connect two notes, and most of all how to become involved with the expression of the musical idea—the number of commands is so many that there really is no time for nerves or wondering what people will think. We have a job to do, and if a piece may have 500 notes in it, the ten items mentioned above will require 5,000 decisions in the space of time it takes to complete the piece. Who has time to think whether or not people will like you? The fact is, if you do all the commands well (as you practiced them) and allow a little spontaneous enjoyment into the event, everyone will like you!

In the final few minutes prior to the performance, spend time keeping your fingers warm, although not necessarily with the repertoire you are about to play. Practice small passages, individual notes, scale sections, articulations, etc. Go over the pieces in your mind. Get an overview of their musical shape. Set the tempos in your mind so that you are solid with your pulses and rhythms. And then relax and breathe deeply. Stretch your arms and back and leg muscles. Gently rotate your shoulders and flex your torso. Remember that you are an athlete. You are going to make your fingers and arms do a complex gymnastic routine; be sure they are warmed up and flexible. Continue to breathe deeply and consciously focus on what that feels like; you want to remember to do that on stage as well. Then consciously tighten up every muscle in your body. Remember what that feels like because you DO NOT want to do that on stage. Finally find your own special device to spark your energy level and your desire to communicate with other people. I close my eyes and, using my hands pull imaginary honey-colored champagne bubbles slowly up through my body, feeling their bubbly energy fill me up. I pull them up to the very top of my head so that they completely fill me, and then pull them back down to my heart, where I focus all my musical energy. This is the last thing I do before I am ready to walk out on stage. If this idea is not for you, find something else, from meditating to praying. The purpose of it must be to take you from the human state you were in to an altered state that is larger than life. You must walk on stage larger and greater than your everyday self. Then, with a final “Let’s do this show!” walk out on stage and play to your audience!

These stages of preparation DO work. In order for them to be completely successful, however, you must believe in them at each stage of preparation. You must do them because you feel they are valid and not because you were told to do them or because you read them somewhere. A great performance requires that the performer transcend mere humanity for a short period of time, thus enabling him/her to lift the audience out of its humanity for the same period of time. It is not possible to transcend humanity automatically. Such an experience must be prepared. As you practice this preparation you will find ways to tailor it to your own needs. That is as it should be. When you transcend your humanity in your own unique way, we the audience will hear your unique musicianship and will be glad that we were able to participate in the special time that you made possible. All your preparation will then have paid off with a most wonderful dividend: a memorable experience.
Learning Music Quickly and Accurately

The closer you move toward professional playing, the faster you will be required to learn music. Professionals in major orchestras frequently play as many as 60 pages of music per week. How does one learn music quickly?

a) When you receive a new piece of music, look over the entire piece before trying to play any of it. Find the difficult spots on the pages and make a note to work on them first. (The longer spent on the difficult passages, the more likely they will be successful. Easier passages need less time.)

b) Look at the tempo that begins the piece and establish a pulse for the piece by snapping your fingers or conducting. Look for written tempo fluctuations (other tempos or ritardandos/rallentandos/accelerandos, etc.). If there are none, set your expectations to play the entire piece/movement with one basic pulse. (You should NOT have tried to play the piece yet!)

c) Sing as much of the piece as possible. Begin to get the piece in your ear. Successful performing combines quick reading of notes with a strong sense of how a piece should sound. If you learn the sound of the piece incorrectly, then you will always practice it incorrectly.

d) Find rhythms that may need to be subdivided, especially in slow movements. Is the movement counted in quarter notes or eighth notes? Are there very fast notes written (such as 32nd or 64th notes)? If so, how will you subdivide those beats to place the small note values exactly where they should go? By practicing these portions of the piece in advance of trying the passages on the instrument, you will increase your likelihood of playing them correctly on the first or second try on the instrument. That will speed your learning since you will not have to spend time unlearning an incorrect set of rhythms.

e) Remember that rhythm is the most important part of music. Without rhythm, a piece has no structure or backbone, and in fact can be completely unrecognizable. Get the rhythms correct first, and then the pitches and bowings will follow.

f) Now take out your instrument and play through a section of the piece. If necessary play under tempo, but keep the rhythms accurate. See if your performed version matches your sung version. Are you hearing what is written down correctly?

g) From the beginning of your contact with the piece, write in the part (if you own it!). Add fingerings, bowings, performance suggestions, eyeglasses, marks to attract attention to a particularly difficult note or passage. Music with no markings has little performance value. The human mind cannot remember enough of what it has learned to recreate a consistent performance without extra marks to assist it.

h) Double check everything you do early on. Doubt your ability to play a piece correctly until you are absolutely sure that you have tested each passage to eliminate any errors of reading or technique.

i) Change your markings as you learn the piece. Markings that first appealed to you may not be musical or logical by the time of the performance. Erase and update each time you feel you have an improvement. Allow yourself to go back to an original fingering if it comes back to feeling better several days later! Markings must feel comfortable and
must make musical sense. Listen to hear if your fingerings disrupt the musical line or if they cause you to err because they are too difficult for your present proficiency.

j) Play all music slowly at first. Give your brain a chance to grasp what you will expect it to command your muscles to do. You are learning a piece, but it will not be learned until your brain can repeatedly, on cue, send commands to your muscles to accomplish the tasks needed to control your instrument and bow and achieve the piece. Increase speed only when you can control the instrument and the piece at a slower tempo. This way you will never be out of control.

If you follow the above guidelines, it is possible to learn an entire concert in a few days. You must remember what you learn from practice session to practice session, and must never exceed the speed at which your brain can learn and then command your muscles.
Preparing for Job Search Success

1. Obviously first and foremost is to take academic preparation for a career as seriously as possible. Learn all you can and retain as much as possible over the years of your training.

2. A typical application consists of a cover letter, resume, letters of recommendation and supporting materials such as a tape, programs, teaching evaluations, publication excerpts, etc.

3. Write your cover letter carefully and practice several letters before you have a specific application deadline. A good cover letter must
   a) be specific to the job for which you are applying.
   b) combine the following 2 things in a creative and interesting way: how and why your specific qualifications will bring strengths to the job for which you are applying.
   c) Give some insight into who you are in the process.

4. A good cover letter does NOT need to restate all your qualifications. The resume should fulfill that need.

5. A good resume should begin with your name and address and phone and email. Then under various clear and consistent headings list your qualifications and experience. Include education, jobs held, expertise acquired, workshops attended, esp. if you presented, professional affiliations like memberships in scholarly societies or musical groups. Mention dates of association with jobs or experience, etc.

6. If you have less experience, describe how the experience you have qualifies you for the job in question. 1-2 short sentences are enough.

7. THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS

   Careers:
   http://www.menc.org/information/infoserv/careersinmusic.htm
   http://www.berklee.edu/html/ca_main.html
   http://www.kenfoster.com/Articles/Careers.htm
   http://www.cmeabaysection.org/occupations.html

   Especially interesting is the following site:
   http://stats.bls.gov/oco/home.htm with emphasis upon these specific links within the site:
   http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos095.htm
   http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos069.htm
   http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos066.htm

   Resume writing:
   http://channels.netscape.com/ns/careers/resume.jsp
   http://www.resume.com/content/resume/
Preparing for Student Teaching Success
(up-to-date as of 2002)

ISU Music Education
8-26-02
Admission to Teacher Education

The University Teacher Education Handbook (August 1999) includes requirements for admission to Teacher Education for all ISU students. Music Education students apply for admission to Teacher Education by first completing a process of admission through the Music Department.

Requirements for Admission to Teacher Education

- **Scholarship**
  - minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 on course work taken at ISU is required for full admission *(note: the grade point must be maintained)* throughout the student’s tenure at ISU even after admission to Teacher Ed. in order to qualify for student teaching including the semester previous to student teaching
  - PRAXIS I (or PPST):
    - minimum composite score: Reading (172), Writing (172), Math (170)
    - Cost: $110 (paper & pencil) or $130 (computer) ~ as of 8-02
    - Test offered on campus
    - Testing Office of Student Counseling Services (2030 Student Services Building) 294-4508

- **Physical and Mental Health**
  - If the Members of the University Teacher Education Committee believe that a student will not be successful as a prospective teacher for reasons of poor physical or mental health (class attendance is one indicator), the student may be asked to:
    - Provide a satisfactory basis for determining his/her present physical health by submitting a written report from a certified physician. This report should cover such factors as general health and disabling handicaps.
    - Provide a satisfactory basis for determining his/her present mental health by submitting a written report from either the Student Counseling Service or a similar source.

- **Character (Ethics) and Interpersonal Relationship Skills**
  - If the Members of the University Teacher Education Committee believe that a student will not be successful as a prospective teacher for reasons related to character (ethics) and/or interpersonal relationship skills the student may be asked to:
    - Satisfactorily complete additional field experiences (not necessarily for credit)
    - Submit letters of recommendation from faculty, supervising instructors, etc., and/or
    - Demonstrate or provide evidence of character (ethics) and/or interpersonal relationship skills necessary to be an effective teacher.

**Note:** For more information, please refer to the University Teacher Education Handbook

**Timetable**

**Fall of Sophomore Year**
- take Music 266 – be appraised of requirements
prepare portfolio (3 copies) for interview with Music Education Faculty by end of October (late or “piecemeal” submissions will not be accepted)

interview with Music Education Faculty in early/mid November

submit completed Teacher Education form

Portfolio (this will help prepare for the Continuation Exam as well)

◊ Philosophy of Music Education (1 page, typed)
◊ Statement by the student (1 page, typed) presenting his/her:
  ⇒ personal goals regarding the teaching profession
  ⇒ self-assessment of progress thus far
  ⇒ self-assessment of plan to be successful in music education (coursework, field experience, student teaching)
◊ Degree Audit from previous semester
◊ 2 letters of recommendation
  ⇒ one from a music professor, one from a professor in another content area
  ⇒ letters are to include comments regarding the student’s ability in the three required areas: scholarship, physical/mental health, character/ethics & interpersonal relationship skills
◊ Paper (3 pages minimum) evidencing writing skills (could be from music history, English, etc. – something already completed)
◊ Completed Teacher Education Application

Interview with Music Education Faculty

* Committee to consist of 3-4 Music Education Faculty
  ◊ Munsen and Laycock required
  ◊ 1-2 others to be selected by the student from the Music Education Faculty (instrumental and/or choral methods, techniques’ teachers, etc.)
* Music Education Faculty will have portfolio materials at least one-week prior to the interviews (late October)
* Interviews to occur early/mid November
  ◊ 15 minute interviews (10 minute interview with student and 5 minute deliberation by faculty)
  ◊ arrange for interviews to occur on 2 evenings in early/mid November
* Interviews will consist of
  ◊ prepared statement by the student (summary of philosophy and self-assessment from the Portfolio)
  ◊ questions by Music Education Faculty
    ⇒ may include questions about Teacher Education Requirements (Scholarship, Physical/Mental Health, Character/Ethics and Interpersonal Relationship Skills)
  ◊ questions by student of faculty

Results Determined/Presented to Student

* Music Education Faculty will make decisions as a team at the conclusion of the interview (privately)
* Licensure Coordinator (Munsen) will notify all students of their status with regards to admission to teacher education
  ⇒ full admission
  ⇒ tentative admission (what conditions need to be met)
  ⇒ not recommending for admission at this time (explanation given)
* Licensure Coordinator will process applicants for teacher education
  ◊ successful students for full admission
◊ students for tentative admission (admitted on the condition that certain requirements be met before they are fully admitted)

**Note:** Regarding the 50-hour observation requirement, only 10 hours may be counted before admission to teacher education.

### 50-Hour Observation Requirement

As required by the State of Iowa, all students in education must complete 50 hours of observation prior to the student teaching term. Music students on the “standard plan” receive credit for their time spent observing in the following way:

10 hours LAS 480 K .5 credit taken concurrently with Music 266
Section 2

#### Acceptance into Teacher Education

Spring of sophomore year

10 hours observations in Spring of sophomore year

10 hours LAS 480 K .5 credit taken concurrently with Music 366
Section 2

10 hours observations in Spring of junior year

10 hours LAS 480 K 1.0 credit taken concurrently with Music 466
Section 1

After Admission to Teacher Education/Prior to Licensure

* PRAXIS II:
  ◊ minimum composite score in area of specialization
  ◊ Cost: $185 (the State of Iowa will pay for this exam 2001-2003)
  ◊ Test offered on campus in November (register in September)
  ◊ Testing Office of Student Counseling Services (2030 Student Services Building) 294-4508
Student Teaching Process

We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

Aristotle

Student teaching is the most important semester of study at Iowa State although you are not on campus. All that you do from the beginning of your freshman year will determine the student teaching placement you "earn" or receive and your success as a student teacher and as a real teacher in the years to come. Your success depends on what you do today to prepare for tomorrow. As Aristotle said, "Excellence...is...a habit."

The major steps along this path to success include: observing in the schools (a state mandate), music education and education courses, applying to and being accepted into the Teacher Education Program, taking tests at a specified level of success (PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II - state mandates), a minimum grade point, applying for and successfully conducting the student teaching semester and applying for and receiving a teaching license.

Regarding scholarship

* maintain a minimum cumulative grade point of 2.5 throughout your tenure at ISU
* minimum composite PRAXIS I scores: Reading (172), Writing (172), Math (170)

What can you do right now?

* Be the best musician you can be - music educators teach 100% of the population
* Maintain an excellent grade point (at least a 2.5) - you might want to go to graduate school as well!
* Take advantage of opportunities to learn as a musician and as an educator including
  o Your own performance
  o Attending concerts
  o Attending conventions and other professional development workshops
  o Be a member of collegiate organizations of the profession
  o Take advantage of observing and teaching opportunities, which are diverse and which can give you "the edge"
  o Maintain a positive attitude about life and learning

Overview of Sequence for Student Teaching

Freshman
Instrumental majors begin taking techniques classes and observing lessons

Sophomore

Fall  Music 266 ~ Introduction to Teaching Music
LAS 480K, Section 2 (.5 credit) ~ 10 hours of observing in the schools
Take PRAXIS I
Apply to Teacher Education (includes portfolio and interview)

Spring  admission to Teacher Education if
2.5 grade point
appropriate PRAXIS I scores
successful portfolio and interview for music ed faculty
physical and mental health
Character (Ethics) and Interpersonal Relationship Skills
10 hours of observing if admitted to Teacher Education

Junior

Fall  Music 366 ~ Methods of Music Education K-8
LAS 480K, Section 2 (.5 credit) ~ 10 hours of observing in the schools

Spring  continuing observing in the schools (10 hours)

Senior

Fall  Music 466 ~ Program Development and Evaluation in Music Education
LAS 480K, Section 1 (1 credit) ~ 10 hours of observing ~ now complete
apply to student teaching
take PRAXIS II Exam (or in January at the beginning of student teaching)

Spring  student teach
apply for teaching license
apply for teaching positions

**Student Teaching:**

http://education.indiana.edu/cas/tt/v3i1/v3i1toc.html

http://www.upenn.edu/pennteach/

http://cnets.iste.org/stupro.html

http://www.csuchico.edu/educ/stport.html

http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/tips/Student_Teaching/

http://www.uwrf.edu/overseas-teaching/
Preparing for Graduate School Success

1. Before you leave undergraduate school be sure you are solidly trained and competent in the following areas: your main instrument, music theory, music history, and if you are an education major, in the field of music education. Graduate schools will require remedial courses if you fail entrance exams in history or theory. These courses will set you back in the progress toward employment.

2. Graduate school courses typically require more research with less assistance from professors. Thus use some of your undergraduate time to learn the following: a) how to navigate the library, especially the data resources like indexes, journals, microfilm, microfiche, other reference resources; b) how to write convincing sentences using good grammar and with clear thoughts; c) how to write bibliographic and footnote citations.

Graduate School: The Four Ws

I. Why
   A. Career Objective
      1. Is graduate school necessary?
      2. Teaching vs. performing
   B. Self-improvement

II. When
   A. Directly from undergraduate program
      1. Momentum
      2. Familiarity with curriculum
      3. Performance fluency
      4. Ease of lifestyle
   B. After a period of employment
      1. Maturity
      2. Knowledge of strengths, weaknesses
      3. Firmer professional goals
      4. Avoids workforce drawback of too much education with no experience
      5. Financial stability

III. Where
   A. Location
      1. Consider a region where you would like to settle
      2. Life-experience factor
   B. Size of campus
      1. Amount of individual attention
      2. Challenge of peers
      3. Performance opportunities
   C. Major professor
      1. Pedagogical philosophy
      2. Previous experience with him/her
         a. Workshop
         b. Lesson
      3. Professional reputation
      4. Professional contacts
      5. Placement record
IV. What
   A. Degree Program
      1. Performance vs. research
      2. Time limit
      3. Residency requirement
   B. Application process
      1. Fees
      2. Auditions
      3. Select schools to cover breadth of prestige
   C. Assistantships
      1. Teaching experience
      2. Stipend
         In-state tuition
Preparing for Foreign Experience

1. Talk to your professors about where is an interesting and valuable place to spend time.
2. Know what your performing/educational/research interests are.
3. Search the WEB for information, and also look for flyers around the department.
4. For performers, make a GREAT tape. Tapes make or break careers and opportunities more than we know!
5. For researchers, edit and re-edit your papers for clarity and language usage.
6. Get a book from the library or bookstore on the country you are visiting and become as familiar as possible with its customs, culture, monetary system, etc. before you go.
7. DON'TFORGET THAT MANY COUNTRIES OUTSIDE EUROPE REQUIRE VISAS. These Visas take a long time to process. Don’t get stuck over here because you procrastinated on this (and the PASSPORT) issues.
8. Save more money than you think you will need. It is always nice to have the buffer for extras instead of cutting costs all the time.
9. Visit your physician and get inoculations and/or prescriptions that are necessary or helpful when visiting those areas. A check of the CDC (Center for Disease Control) website(s) can also provide helpful information on such topics as malaria or dengue fever, etc. in certain areas, especially outside Europe.
10. Consider the following kinds of foreign experience:
    - Fulbright
    - Competitions
    - Opera Houses
    - International Courses
    - Private Study
    - Degree Program in a Foreign School
    - Summer study in established summer courses
    - U.S. based scholarships for international research
STUDY ABROAD

I. SOME REASONS TO STUDY ABROAD
   • to broaden your education, of course.
   • to experience a different perspective on music in general and your particular instrument.
   • to enlighten yourself about the broader musical world and to experience the influence of art, architecture, a different culture, the economies and of course, travel.

II. DIFFERENT PROGRAMS OF STUDY:
   1. Study privately with a master teacher.
      • only through that teacher. (home or studio)
      • through a conservatory of music or university setting.
   2. Obtain a “degree.”
      • the system is quite different than here in the United States.
      ***I studied at the Conservatory of Music in Geneva, Switz.
      • different levels of study: diploma, certificate, class of perfection, and finally the highest degree - the Class of Virtuosity.
      • there are no grades.
      • at the end of the course of study are examinations which must be passed in specified order.
      Result: either passing with a particular rating or not passing.

III. EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES:
   1. Competitions - within the school, country and internationally.
   2. Concerts
   3. Radio Recordings - very well paid
   4. Recordings for Eurovision - very well paid
   ***** Each one of these activities allow you to meet other people and they will in turn introduce you to others. If you like, you can build a network of peers and friends who can further broaden your experiences and opportunities.

IV. WHEN TO STUDY ABROAD?:
   1. After the Bachelors degree.
   2. After the Masters degree.
   3. Or after working in the music field for awhile.

V. HOW TO PREPARE:
   1. Make certain that you have an excellent command of your instrument, and the largest repertoire that you possibly can have.
   2. Make certain that you have a thorough command of music theory
      • European musicians are very knowledgeable and have a complete command of music theory and harmony because of the rigorous curriculum they are required to take and beginning at a VERY EARLY AGE!
   ***** I have heard European musicians say that they excel in music theory and the Americans are by far better performers because of their technique and knowledge of the repertoire.

VI. •DECIDE WHO YOU WANT TO STUDY WITH AND CONTACT THEM
   •NORMALLY THERE WILL BE AN AUDITION
   •PERHAPS YOU HAVE ALREADY PLAYED OR SUNG FOR A TEACHER

VII. SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID
   AT ISU -
103 different programs
Web page: Home Page, students, study abroad, link called “globetrotter”
Applications on line, financing.

1. Fulbright - Carolyn Payne - Graduate Office - 4-2682
   Booklet and form as to how to apply.
   • AN EXCELLENT PROGRAM
   • However, you may request to study with a particular teacher or go to a particular country. Your request may not always be honored.

2. Have to be a student:
   - scholarship - Molly, Study Abroad Office: 4-6792
   - financial aid - Clay Gurganus, Financial Aid Office 4-2094
   Apply for both as a present student

OTHER -

3. Scholarships from the conservatory or university or city where you will study.

4. Rotary Scholarship

VII. • • • • • • • • I believe after study abroad, there will not be one single day that YOU will not be influenced in some way or another from the very special experiences you encountered during your studies abroad.

Preparing for Professional Life

1. The first year of a new job is without question the most difficult. Expect longer hours as you learn the job and find your routine.

2. Most music jobs are time and labor intensive. Those who do the best at their job and make the biggest difference spend many hours beyond the average working day gathering materials, practicing, designing lesson plans that are interesting and efficient, rethinking courses they have already taught to improve them, etc.

3. Keep an extra copy of all materials such as handouts or homework or tests in any year. Many times these can be used in subsequent years, thus decreasing your workload from the first year. Be careful of reusing tests, though, as students are amazingly inventive in finding ways to access previous tests, as dishonest as this is.

IF YOU FIND NEW WEB SITES OF GOOD QUALITY AND RELEVANCE, PLEASE EMAIL THEM TO DR. STURM AT

jsturm@iastate.edu