

# Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

## Music as a Performing Art

A Note from the Editor



### About the Editor

Rhonda Ringering, NCTM has crafted a career as a pianist, a writer and an instructor. She has released four CDs, is an active solo and collaborative performer of both classical and jazz, and her articles have appeared in *American Music Teacher*, *Piano & Keyboard*, *Flute Talk*, *Clavier*, and *Keyboard Companion*. She received her MM from Boston University.

The only time I ever saw my strict Seventh-day Adventist grandmother dance was during an impromptu living room performance I gave of “New York, New York” at a Rizzo family reunion. The only way I could say goodbye to my Uncle Pat when he was in his last week of life was to play his favorite hymns for him over the phone. The only time I have improvised an entire piece, with a mandolin player, in front of an audience, was so magical it still makes me smile when I think of it. None of these performances got any press or did anything to improve my resume, but each of them is special to me because they are why I am a pianist: to share music with others.

We become musicians because we love the act of making music and we want to give it as a gift. Audience size doesn’t matter—whether playing for one or one thousand, the job is the same. We play, the notes are received and understood, and something valuable is communicated.

In this issue, *Oregon Musician* looks at Music as a Performing Art. From the physical and neurological aspects of performing to practical how-to tips, each article examines an aspect of the mystery of our shared time-based art form. Contributors Dr. Diane Baxter, Angela Neiderloh, Larry Rauch, Natalie Gunn, and Dr. Jill Timmons—along with featured interview subject, pianist Cary Lewis—share years of experience as professional performers and educators. Nothing can prepare someone for the reality of performing, but these tips and anecdotes—brought straight from the stage to the page—help point the way.

Many years ago, while studying in England, a friend once corrected me when I referred to my stack of scores as my music. The truth of her comment—that the scores were the notes and that it only became music when I played the notes—seems more important each time I play or listen to someone else play. We are the living legacy of music each time we learn it, love it, and share it with others.

—Rhonda Ringering, NCTM

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Editor: Rhonda Ringering, NCTM

Design: Julie Weiss of Tobias Weiss Design

# The Science of Artistry (The Fourth String)

by Dr. Diane Baxter



## About the Author

Pianist Diane Baxter, DMA, NCTM, is currently Professor of Music and Chair of the Music Department at Western Oregon University where she has received awards for outstanding creativity and for excellence in teaching. She is an active soloist, collaborative artist, and orchestral musician. Diane's solo CD, *Alive at Dawn*, was released in 2003. She adjudicates piano festivals throughout the northwest and is well known for her seminars on performance anxiety.

The Blüthner waits on the stage. The top three octaves of the piano include a fourth string for each note, strings which are never struck directly, but vibrate sympathetically to enhance the overtones of the instrument.<sup>1</sup> It includes over six thousand parts in its Renner keyboard action. Fifteen coats of special lacquer are applied to the soundboard, white spruce with fewer than fifteen rings per inch. This piano is the result of highly developed scientific principles, with physics writ large in its magnificent presence, all so that it can create beauty.

Any artist who comes to play this piano must recognize that the performer's body is a partner to the instrument, another complex creative "tool" upon which the music depends. All pianists want to perform well, to deliver the meaning of the music, and to enjoy the unfolding moments of creation. Just as the instrument received careful attention during its creation, the body requires careful attention to partner successfully with the piano for performances of focus, power, and joy.

Neuroscientists have discovered that the motor cortex and the cerebellum in musicians' brains are distinguishable from non-musicians upon imaging. The motor cortex shows changes within minutes of a pianist playing simple five-finger patterns.<sup>2</sup> Further, the brains of musicians are different on autopsy than those of non-musicians. "Gottfried Schlaug at Harvard and his colleagues . . . published a paper showing that the corpus callosum . . . that connects the two hemispheres of the brain, is enlarged in professional musicians."<sup>3</sup> Obviously memories, thoughts, and experiences are not visible, yet trained anatomical scientists can identify the brains of musicians "without a moment's hesitation."<sup>4</sup> This astounding information provides evidence that music making is a highly specialized activity. "Music makes extraordinary demands on the brain. A pianist performing the eleventh variation of the Sixth Paganini Etude by Franz Liszt must play a staggering 1,800 notes per minute."<sup>5</sup>

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These brain developments are the result of a highly developed athleticism. Excellent coordination, ambidexterity, breath control, finely tuned large and small motor movements, muscular strength, a keenly developed awareness of spatial parameters, the ability to pace oneself, highly developed auditory acuity, and a necessity to use these skills in endlessly varied combinations is basic to playing a piece. In addition, musicians must know how to use their bodies in ways that enhance the music while undergoing the stress of performance. Training with intense focus will lead to successful performances.

To learn the art of performance one must experience it. There is no substitute.<sup>6</sup> Crucial to performance is that one *knows* the music. What does it mean to *know* in this context? One must understand and execute the technique of a piece, comprehend structural and stylistic demands, interpret the music artistically, and memorize it visually, kinesthetically, and aurally. In addition, the artist must know how to interact with the myriad physical responses to stress. High levels of anxiety can trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response. Common manifestations are sweaty or clammy hands, shallow breathing, an inability to think, shaking in the hands and feet, nausea, heightened auditory awareness, visual disturbances, and time distortion.

Knowing *about* something is quite different from experiencing it. Mr. Sebok told a masterclass once, "It is much easier to drive a car that is not moving."<sup>7</sup> Performers must learn to create while "driving the car" and to direct the added fuel towards creative means. As pianist Alon Goldstein said "I never feel as if I know a piece until I have played it at least twice in concert."<sup>8</sup>

Careful attention to the body while learning a piece informs and guides how to be during a performance. In a sense, it is like putting down the foundation for a building. Attention to detail is crucial during the construction process, but one doesn't think about that aspect while standing on the twelfth floor. What occurs in the brain is that early in the process of learning new material, a massive number of neurons are required for the task. As fluency is gained, the neurons become more and more efficient and the number needed to produce the gesture is greatly reduced.<sup>9</sup> Attention during the learning process means that the performer can eventually release it from the thinking stage and trust it to be strong enough for performance.<sup>10</sup>

It is common to derail the learning process by lacking focus, talking too much, interrupting constantly, mistrusting intuition, and allowing sloppiness with the fingers, hands, and arms. Being able to recall music is directly related to the intensity of focus while committing it to memory. Fuzzy input delivers fuzzy output. Even if we are unaware of the links, it is impossible to separate musical gestures from the body's production of them. If those links are not established and rehearsed, interruptions and lack of flow will produce the opposite of what is desired. Bela Nagy once told a group of graduate students at Boston University, "We practice and we practice and we play the wrong thing. Then we get it right and we go home!"<sup>11</sup> The kinesthetic nature of the body requires accurate repetition in order to build trustworthy pathways in the circuitry of the brain.

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Consider the case of Mogens Englehardt. Dr. Englehardt had a full career as a biochemist and professor on the Medical Faculty at the University of Copenhagen. Mogens (pronounced Mo-wens) is also a remarkable and accomplished pianist who plays with tangible and contagious joy.<sup>12</sup> He studied piano as a child and by age fifteen was performing Beethoven chamber works in recital. He developed a love of collaborative music making and worked with many fine artists over the years. Mogens loved nature and being out of doors studying plants and animals for hours, so he decided to pursue a career in science. "Science was an irresistible intellectual challenge, constantly developing and changing the world." The piano and playing music always ran a rich parallel to his professional life.

Tragedy struck when Mogen's beloved wife was diagnosed with advanced stage cervical cancer. During that same time, Mogens developed tinnitus accompanied by a dramatically increased sensitivity to sounds in general. He could not tolerate the sound of the piano and assumed that his musical days had ended. By the time he retired in 2008 Mogens had lived with the tinnitus for three years. He had lost his wife and his music and had left his career. "I got pains in my back, which had become crooked after many years' work at the computer, and I couldn't stand upright against a wall. I also got serious pains in my left hip, so that I could hardly walk." He sought physiotherapy and eventually managed to cure himself of pain by following a physiotherapy regimen. After the treatments were complete, Mogens found a fitness center with more sophisticated equipment. After his *second* session at the gym, he awoke the following day and wondered why everything in his house was so low. "Everything seemed to be bewitched. Then I suddenly realized that there was a complete silence in my ears! The tinnitus had gone! It turned out that my back had straightened and my height had increased . . . I burst into tears." The tinnitus had ceased because an impinged nerve was freed by the physical workouts.

Given the new peace in his head, Mogens returned to the piano. "When I began playing the piano again I quickly realized that I had lost my technique. It was a struggle to come back to the keys and after a year I almost gave up. I was horrified when I heard recordings of my playing—it was disgusting—and I could not find out how to change it". When Mogens' granddaughter began showing an interest in the piano, Mogens purchased a new instrument for her. Before the piano could be properly regulated, it needed to acclimatize for six months. The instrument was loud and difficult to dampen, so Mogens played very lightly on it. That simple physical change relaxed some muscles in his hands and fingers, and when he went back to his own keyboard he felt a positive change in technique. Mogens had begun making ceramics and jewelry post-retirement, and he credits intricate design work on two ceramic tea lights and some jewelry with another breakthrough. The use of the fine motor movements of his fingers had a direct impact on his piano technique.

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Each finger has a specific area in the motor cortex of the brain, maps which must be stimulated to remain well-defined. If a map which is meant to be separate is not used, another function will take over that part of the cortex. If two fingers are taped together and used that way for a period of time, the maps blend and are no longer differentiated. If one finger moves, the other will move. However, through use the brain can be remapped and the areas will become clear once again.<sup>13</sup> Clearly Mogens was reestablishing those motor cortex areas with fine muscle movements. Eventually he learned how to relax his hands and fingers while playing and continues to rebuild his skill. Mogens' joy in playing is a profound lesson for all who hear him. "To know that your intentions in music come through is an enormous stimulus for further work . . . I feel life to be more intense when I play and I experience the most complete harmony afterwards. It is as if the whole world is present. I never feel lonely at the keys. It's a relief. In a way it is like clearing the chimney of the soul."

All performers can benefit by attending to the body and its direct relationship to musical creation. Just as the piano needs tuning, maintenance, and care, so does the body. And just as the fourth strings of the Blüthner are not struck but are drawn into the music, so must the body resonate, freely, without dampening or interruption. The fluency that results is extraordinary.

The piano is waiting.

### Endnotes

1. The Aliquot System, the fourth string design, was patented in 1872 by Julius Bluthner Accessed November 28, 2011. <http://www.bluthnerpiano.com/bspecs.html>
2. Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2008 ), p.100.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Zatorre, Robert J., Joyce L. Chen, and Virginia B. Penhune. "When the Brain Plays Music: Auditory—Motor Interactions in Music Perception and Production" in *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience*, 8. Nature Publishing Group (2007): 548-558. Accessed December 10, 2011. <http://www.nature.com/nrn/journal/v8/n7/full/nrn2152.html>
6. One of Mark Twain's great lines applies to the value of performance. "[A] person that started in to carry a cat home by the tail was getting knowledge that was always going to be useful to him, and warn't ever going to grow dim or doubtful". Accessed December 10, 2011. <http://www.twainquotes.com/Cats.html>

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7. Sebok, Georgy. *Masterclass for Pianists*. Workshop held at Linfield College, McMinnville, OR, June, 1993.
8. Goldstein, Alon. *Seminar and Masterclass for Pianists*. Workshop held at Paul Roberts' Music at Ambialet, Ambialet, France, August 2010. In a subsequent e-mail (12/20/2011) Alon wrote "I think I said more like 'twenty times in concert'. Maybe I did not want to discourage people by saying twenty . . . to know the piece you do have to play a piece in concert a number of times, AND leave it aside and go back to it later on (in a year or two or more) four or five times. I guess it only gets more complicated."
9. Pengelly, Scott. E-mail to the author, December 27, 2011. The progression from learning to knowing is called "Long Term Potentiation", a critical process in how our brains build neuronal pathways.
10. Yogi Berra's "You can't think and hit at the same time" comes to mind.
11. Nagy, Bela Boszormenyi. *Studio Masterclass*. Weekly performance class held at Boston University, Boston, MA, 1974.
12. Mogens Englehardt. E-mail to the author, November 13, 2011. All information given by Dr. Englehardt is contained in this e-mail. I have his permission to repeat it here.
13. Doidge, Norman. *The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 63–64.
14. The author wishes to express gratitude to Scott Pengelly, PhD, Clinical Psychologist in Eugene, Oregon, for his generosity in sharing resources and experience and for particularly stimulating dialogue during the writing of this article. Dr. Pengelly says "I help people excel under duress, often people who are wearing sneakers."



# The Hostess (or Host) With the Most-est! (How to Enjoy the Art of Auditioning)

by Angela Neiderloh



## About the Author

Angela Neiderloh is a voice instructor at Portland State University and Pacific University, and is co-founder of VOX Northwest Voice Studios. She appears nationally as a private voice instructor, guest lecturer, artistic director and master clinician. Leading solo performances include: Portland Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, San Francisco Opera Center and Boston Baroque. For more information, visit: [www.angelaniederloh.com](http://www.angelaniederloh.com), or [www.voxnorthwest.com](http://www.voxnorthwest.com).

Think about the most successful hosts and hostess that you know. They welcome you in, make you feel at ease and comfortable. They have tasty hor d'oeuvres to nibble on and the most appropriate jazz standards playing in the background!

The same could be said for your next audition. "What?!" You may ask? Think about it. Like a good hostess you too can set up an environment where your guests—your audition panel—can feel comfortable and look forward to sampling your musical offerings. We can set the tone of our audition experience just by tweaking our thinking and turning an otherwise intimidating environment into something where we are in the driver's seat, full of creative possibility.

As a good hostess or host, here are some things to keep in mind:

### **Be yourself**

We can all identify someone inauthentic. That does not mean you can't be nervous or even excited about the possibility of being cast in the next show or endeavor, but don't feel like you need to "put on airs" or act like the "teacher's pet." One of the things that I keep hearing from colleagues in the business of auditioning is that there are A LOT of singers these days. It is a given that all of them can sing well and perform the text effectively, but where the rubber meets the road is the kind of person you want to interact with. Someone who is a "know it all" may get hired, but it is the type of person who has integrity, openness, kindness, and is willing to risk being themselves who gets hired back.

### **Keep your cool**

As much as you prepare for the big audition, not everything is going to go as planned. That is the excitement and thrill of a live performance—both for you and your audience. The important thing to keep in mind is to keep your cool. The months or years of preparation are not going to suddenly



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leave you. Trust all of the methodical work and attention that you have invested in your practice time and preparation. Take a deep breath and know that you have an opportunity to make a different choice the very next phrase. Remember we are not robots and so many factors can contribute to a certain phrase not being executed as easily as it had been in the practice room. Most of the folks that we audition for know and understand this too. Most of these professionals are looking for potential, not a finished product.

### **Make your guests feel welcome and at home**

Your judges, like your invited guests, want to have a good time, want you to succeed, and want to be inspired. They want nothing more than to be able to claim that they discovered you; they want you to be their “it” girl or guy. Know that this enthusiasm is not always transparent on their faces. Judges are the ultimate multi-taskers—trying to take in a lot of information of their host (you) all at once. This isn’t your mother you’re auditioning for; you may not always get a smile during your audition. It’s okay; don’t read too much into the faces of your guests. Trust that they have your best interest in mind and are possibly concentrating on what role they would cast you in or calculating how much money they can offer you.

With all this in mind, I would not, and I do mean, DO NOT walk up to your judges straight away and shake their hands hello. For some judges, they prefer a healthy distance from their auditionees. Assuming this, you are better off assuming your position next to or at the piano, maintaining a positive and upbeat attitude while announcing your musical offerings and still respecting their comfort level.

### **Be prepared**

Like a good host, you must prepare as best as possible. Select pieces that encompass differing styles and genres that show off all that you can do. If you should be in need of a pianist for your audition, see if you can hire and rehearse with him or her ahead of time. This will only benefit and aid in the success of your audition. They, like your auditioners, are also guests at your party. They too want to contribute and be instrumental (pardon the pun) in the success of your audition. In short, be courteous to your pianists; make sure that you come prepared with a clean copy of your music with appropriate and clean markings/cuts.

Never forget that judges will talk amongst themselves and also might invite the opinion of your pianist. How you interact with your pianist might directly (and many times does) influence the outcome of your audition.

### **Be creative**

Nothing ever goes perfectly, but as a good hostess you always have options and can think on your feet.

The good hostess might accidentally burn the crostini for the bruschetta or the pasta course might not come out exactly al dente, but a good hostess also never lets it

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show. A good host or hostess always has another dish to offer to guests, “Here, try the mushroom caps, they’re fabulous!”

You, too, as the performer might run out of breath mid phrase, but you always have the very next musical phrase to make a different choice—to take a lower, grounded breath to not only get through the musical phrase, but to be intentional and artistic. Take a moment to review your game plan. Now, as the artist, you get to claim, “Here, listen to how I phrase this next section or how clean and musical my coloratura is; it’s fabulous!”

### **Be kind to yourself**

We are, of course, our own worst critics. Why does it need to be that way? We should be our own biggest fans and cheerleaders motivating ourselves to excel. We are not always going to have our mentors or teachers present after we walk out of that audition room to give us praise or some encouraging words. We need to be able to do that for ourselves. We need to be as present and giving to ourselves just as we were to our guests on that audition panel.

Remember, we only have control over preparing our offerings as best as we can. Not everyone is going to necessarily like our musical dishes—they may even be allergic!—but there is always another party to host next, week, month or year.

Happy Hosting!



# Successful Jazz Band Performances for the Classical Pianist

by Larry Rauch



## About the Author

Larry Rauch received his B.A. in music composition from Iowa State University in 1981. He has been teaching piano in Bend, OR, specializing in jazz and pop styles, for 23 years. His recordings include two full-length CDs and a single under his own name (available at [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com)), he has contributed songs to two other artists' projects and a Web site. He performs regularly in Central Oregon.

During their years of teaching, most teachers will have students who play in the High School Jazz Band, and who need to improvise solos for some of the tunes the ensemble is performing. In this article I will give some practical tips for assisting students through this intimidating task.

Of course, it is a daunting challenge chiefly because our students learn to play by reading notes on a page. So when the young pianist comes to a section of the jazz band "chart" where there are only chord symbols to guide him or her and a solo is required, it can be like being thrown into a lake and exhorted to swim without any prior instruction.

The first step in accomplishing this task is to help the student find some notes for those measures. There are two ways to approach this, depending on how experienced your student is with jazz and how adventurous he or she is. The first is to study the jazz scales that go with the various major, minor, and dominant 7th chords and decide which scales will need to be utilized in the solo section due to the chord symbols printed on the music. If neither you nor your student has a jazz resource book, I recommend getting one now, and incorporating some of this theory in lessons as soon as the student starts playing with the jazz band. Two of the many good books out there are *Jazz: How to Play and Improvise Vol. 1* (Jamey Aebersold Jazz publisher), and *Jazz Piano from Scratch* by Charles Beale (Assoc. Board of the Royal Schools of Music publisher). Both of these include practice CDs.

Once your student knows which scales fit with the chords indicated, he or she must spend some time at home developing some jazzy melodies from those scales. The specifics of how one does that are beyond the scope of this article, but a few of the tricks are skipping certain notes of the scales, and adding eighth-note rests, accents, neighbor tones, and repeated notes. Jazz Hanon and Blues Hanon

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by Amsco Publications, and *Teach Yourself to Play Blues* from Alfred Publishing contain many notated melodies that may be useful. Have the student try using a similar melody for the 3rd and 4th measures as the first two, starting on a different note, like a sequence in classical style.

The other way to develop a solo, once the student understands what the chord symbols mean, is to help him or her actually work out some jazzy licks (motifs) or short melodies that work with those chords. Ideas can sometimes be found elsewhere in the piano part of that chart or another piece the student is playing. Virtually every jazz or blues tune my students have learned from the books I use contains delightful melodic clichés, and at this stage of the learning process, there's nothing wrong with borrowing a couple of those to use in a solo. Of course, they will probably have to be transposed to fit the key of the chart. Once the student has come up with a good motif that fits the chords and style, suggest he or she repeat it, perhaps a couple of times. They could easily have filled up 4 or 6 measures of the solo at that point. More advanced players often begin improvisations by playing an altered version of the main melody for the tune ("the head" in jazz terminology). That may be another way to get the solo started.

A general guideline should be mentioned here. In order for the improvising to be heard over the rest of the band, it's best to stick with notes above middle C.

If the student's band director has provided a recording of the tune, and the student has a good ear, it may be possible to copy or approximate parts of a solo on the recording, and not necessarily the piano solo. Many band directors have experience in improvising and may provide suggestions for their students. This article assumes students are preparing without such input.

Let me emphasize that the goal is not to have them impress everyone with a barrage of sixteenth notes and clever rhythmic elements. Something simple that fits the style and chords which they can deliver effectively is much preferable. I recommend keeping the left hand part very basic, such as one chord held until the next chord is indicated, or omitting the left hand altogether. Most of what the left hand plays is obscured by the other rhythm section instruments in a typical band situation anyway.

Whichever way students arrive at the melodies they're going to use, the most important thing to help them with is how they're going to begin and end the solo. Sketch out the first 2 or 4 measures in approximate notation on manuscript paper if necessary to help them remember them. If either you or your students have a computer with recording software, recording these measures would be an alternative means of remembering them. Then emphasize practicing them the same way each time, more or less like a

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phrase of a written piece. Do the same with the last 2 measures. Being confident of how one is going to get into and out of the solo greatly reduces the stress of this challenge. What they play in between should be worked out with some intentionality as well.

Some readers may be protesting at this point, “but that isn’t improvising,” and of course, it isn’t. Learning to truly improvise with creativity and spontaneity requires years spent with good study materials, learning solos from recordings, and regular jam sessions with a small group, all preferably guided by a mentor. What I am offering is a way to get your student prepared for the opportunity apart from such a serious, long-term approach. I would not call this a short-cut. It is more like a completely different route to competence for a very specific situation within a short time frame. It has definite advantages, especially for students who have no real experience with improvising.

If you have a creative, confident student who is determined to use the melodies you’ve crafted together as a launching pad for a flight of improvised fancy, I would encourage him or her to go for it. The results of this experiment during the concert performance will likely influence how the student approaches the next opportunity.

Another step that will help students feel more confident about performing their solos with the band is giving them a practice experience that feels a bit like that environment. I usually turn on my keyboard and utilize one of the pre-programmed jazz or blues rhythms which are similar to the style of the tune the student is learning. I then play along, using the chords from the section where the solo is indicated. First the student just practices the measures where he or she is soloing. But just as important is to begin this exercise 6 to 8 measures before the solo starts, and have the student play exactly what is written in the chart and then practice getting into the solo. I want to underscore the value of this aspect of the preparation.

Teachers who are not comfortable with this type of accompanying or don’t have a keyboard with pre-programmed rhythms may want to consider purchasing the *Band in a Box* software, available from [MidiStore.com](http://MidiStore.com). It was recommended by Dr. Matt Cooper, NCTM, of Blue Mountain District, as a way to create an ensemble experience with the appropriate chords without having to play the chords and rhythms.

It is probably obvious, but I will point out that your work with the students in their lessons can only take them so far. However, by incorporating these practice activities into their lessons, your students will be better prepared for trying their solos during the band’s rehearsals, and with several such rehearsals under their belts, they will be less anxious when they perform before an audience. They will also be more likely to have a positive experience and want to do it again.



## Why Are You Playing That Piece? An Interview with Dr. Cary Lewis, NCTM

by Rhonda Ringering, NCTM



Dr. Cary Lewis, NCTM

“Chamber Music Northwest called me at 10:00 that morning,” Cary Lewis says. “André Watts had fallen and they asked me, ‘do you know the Beethoven g minor cello sonata? Can you play it tonight? Rehearsal is at noon.’ That was challenging, but it was fun. It wasn’t perfect, but it was challenging and fun.”

In a career that has spanned decades and has taken Lewis around the globe, challenging and fun seem to be good descriptors of much of his artistic life. He joined William Preucil (concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra) and Dorothy Lewis as members of the Lanier Trio, which was featured on NPR’s Saint Paul Sunday broadcast. Their recording of the complete Dvorak Trios was honored by *TIME* magazine as one of the ten best music recordings of any kind in 1993. He has performed at Carnegie Hall, Bargemusic, the Library of Congress, the White House, the Kennedy Center, Wigmore Hall in London, the National Philharmonic in Warsaw, and in other music capitols in the United States and Europe. He retired from the faculty of Georgia State University in Atlanta and is now based in Portland, Oregon. He is the director of chamber music for the Astoria Music Festival, and in recent years has participated in festivals in Montana, Colorado, Michigan, Maine, Hawaii, St. Croix, and Turkey, with additional concerts in Australia, Southeast Asia, and South America. He has recorded works from the standard literature as well as music by American composers on the Turnabout, Vanguard, Educo, Coronet, Crystal, Orion, Musical Heritage Society, ACA, Albany, MSR Classics, and Gasparo labels.

Lewis is humble and surprisingly candid about his career. When asked about his choice to become a collaborative performer rather than a soloist, his answer is refreshingly honest:

“I started doing ensemble work during my undergrad years because I was beginning to display a very prominent predilection for memory slips. I enjoyed performing, and because of playing for church and high school choirs I developed a sense of working with

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others. But I knew I would forget anything I memorized, no matter how hard I worked. I was famous in school for being a good pianist who couldn't get through anything." He pauses and smiles. "But I've had a fun ride. Dorothy and I went lots of places we never would have been able to go and afford to do, and met a lot of people we never expected to meet."

Some of those exotic places were reached on luxury cruise ships Lewis and his wife, cellist Dorothy Lewis, sailed on as guest entertainers. For a few minutes, Lewis and I digress from our interview to swap cruise ship stories and people who overlapped both our paths. Some of the joys and challenges of performing on ships leads Lewis into insightful thoughts on performing for any audience.

"The experiences we have when we're performing are not the kind of things we're trained for. We have to hold their interest. When we performed, I tried to have as much fun as we could but still play as well as possible. One day on Silversea, when I was introducing a piece, I heard an audience member whisper, 'this guy is funny!' I wanted them to have a good time. A ship audience isn't one that has to stay there. If they don't like it, they walk out, particularly when the casino is up the hall!" He grins. "We kept most of our audiences."

Lewis built his career both within and outside academia, but when asked what young performers most need in order to make a career as a performer, he is quick to mention experience in creating performing opportunities—that and doing a lot of playing for people in order to learn to accept yourself as you are, faults and all.

"It's so easy to wait to play for people until it's perfect," he says. "It's better to play as often as you can—even when things aren't perfect. Our violinist used to say, 'no one wants to hear a perfect performance; they want to hear something where something happens.' We never over-rehearsed. We practiced to get our antennas in tune. We got to the place where we would like to fake each other out a bit in performance."

He recalls one particular Mozart Sonata with a "doodle, doodle do" pattern in it that became an internal joke between the three members of the Lanier Trio. One time, in a performance in Auburn, Alabama, he came to a place in a piano solo where he had a little thing worked out with "the doodle", but when he hit that spot, Preucil unexpectedly came in a third below.

"It scared the hell out of me," Lewis admits, "but the audience loved it!"

Earlier in his career, Lewis did about 70 performances a year—sometimes five or six totally different things in a week. He was the "go-to" pianist at Interlochen. And, of course, all that performing was on top of teaching 25 hours a week.

"A lot of performance has to do with performing," he says. "Performances have to happen often enough that it is not a big deal to get up and play for people. It is part of who you are and what you do. You don't have the expectations that it isn't particularly special. It's just what you do."

## Why Are You Playing That Piece? An Interview with Dr. Cary Lewis, NCTM

Lewis and his fellow undergraduate colleagues used to laugh when their instructor, the great Eugene List said, “you don’t know a piece until you’ve performed it at least 30 times.” He learned the truth of List’s words during his last year of study with List when he did a program thirty times and learned so much, the most important thing being that no matter how well you know something, nothing is perfect.

“But,” Lewis adds, “on a higher level it IS perfect because that is what is supposed to happen and so it is perfect.” After a brief silence, he adds, “Besides, playing music is like sex—there are a lot more reasons to do it than to worry about doing it right!”

Lewis’ passionate and playful approach to music was one he shared with his students over his many years of teaching. He chose to focus on emotion rather than technique, frequently asking his students fundamental questions: What is the definition of technique? How you do something? What are you doing? Why are you playing this piece or this passage? When you play scales, it isn’t music. How would you make it music?

“Going from there, when you’re talking about moving the muscles, you are putting the reason on top of it.”

In his teaching he would also talk about the difference between touching and feeling—touching is what you do to someone else; feeling is what they do to you.

“I would pursue this and say ‘pianos are people too. How does the piano feel?’ This brings what’s happening to you into the functioning of it.” He speaks of a master class where he coached a beautiful teenage girl who played a Chopin nocturne as if it were Beethoven. He tried the standard things to help the music open up but they didn’t work. Finally, out of earshot of the audience, he asked her, “Do you have a boyfriend? What’s he like?” She smiled, and at that point she started to play the piece, not just the notes.

Lewis’ teaching philosophy was best expressed in a St. Thomas Aquinas quote he had hanging on his door for students to read on their way back out into the world. “He who works with his hands is a laborer. He who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman. He who works with his hands, his head, and his heart is an artist.”

This philosophy is in direct opposition to most competition teachers and when asked about the relevance of competitions, Lewis relates a favorite quote he once saw on an office door at a university in Florida where he was judging the state auditions for the Florida Music Teachers Association: “Mozart never won a competition and that’s all I need to know about competitions!”

“My self identity is not whether or not my students win competitions,” he adds. “I don’t like competitions. My students would win even though I wasn’t the one who taught technique. I got the riot act from colleagues, but my students always won the competition.”



## Why Are You Playing That Piece? An Interview with Dr. Cary Lewis, NCTM

He goes on to discuss the concept of competition, particularly big ones with multiple judges, and how they seem to go for the mean--if someone does something special, half the judges will love it; half will hate it. The special pianists don't do as well mathematically as the ones who play it "safe." The victims of this system are the very people with whom we want to share music: the public.

"The public hears the safe winners; they get nothing from it and then they say classical music is not for them. And in smaller competitions, when there is only one judge, the result says nothing definitive about the quality of the contestants. It only informs us what that judge likes."

As Lewis reflects on his work as a performer and a teacher, he sums up the job of both with one word: react.

"Our business is to react and to guide by reacting to what we hear, even when we're playing by ourselves. We have to react to what we hear. Always trying to find a way to reconcile what we're hearing with what we intended to hear."

He pauses and then tells of a performance that changed his life. He was taking a sensuality course where he was to play a little something and then study how each sense affected what he was doing.

"We were working on hearing and I agreed to play a Chopin prelude and see what happened. I played it. It was OK. And when asked, I said, 'it was OK. I was working with the sound but I never got exactly what I wanted, but you didn't know what I wanted so I figured you would hear the color changes and think it was OK.' They said, play it again and listen for what you like." He pauses. "It was a HUGE difference. When I finished, no one could say anything because everybody was crying." Another pause. "I think there's a lesson here somewhere."

The flyer for the Lanier Trio included a quote from its namesake: "music is love, in search of a word." To this, Cary Lewis adds,

"Music is every emotion in search of a word."



# New Voices

by Natalie Gunn



## About the Author

Soprano Natalie Gunn brings colorful interpretations to stages throughout the west coast. Recent concert engagements include *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, and *Carmina Burana*. She teaches at her home studio in Tualatin, and is a member of the voice faculty at Linfield College and Willamette University. Passionate about education, Natalie is an active member of NATS and OMTA, and an Associate Trainer for The Center for Teacher Effectiveness..

## The Power of Presence in Performance

Why is it that certain performers capture your attention and others do not? How is it that a person's stage presence can captivate you and sweep you along on a journey of feelings? That unmistakable mystique has been called many things, such as the "it" factor, or charisma. Whether it is a dynamic personality at a party, an actor or dancer, a musician, or a successful athlete, the one thing they share in common is presence. Why is that important, and why does it feel so good?

We live in rapidly changing times. Dr. Ken Robinson expertly outlines this cultural revolution in the new 2011 edition of his brilliant book, *Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative*.

"In the 21st century humanity faces some of its most daunting challenges. Our best resource is to cultivate our singular abilities of imagination, creativity and innovation. Our greatest peril would be to face the future without investing fully in those abilities. Doing so has to become one of the principal priorities of education and training everywhere." (Robinson, p. 47)

As teachers of music, we have an important obligation to help our students understand the elements of music. Just as important, I believe, is our calling to help them develop an appreciation of being fully creative in the moment. Dr. Ellen J. Langer writes in her inspiring book, *The Power of Mindful Learning*:

“A mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective. Mindlessness, in contrast, is characterized by an entrapment in old categories; by automatic behavior that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective.” (Langer, p. 4)

Our cultural fixation with instant information, immediate feedback, and endless resources at our fingertips too often traps our minds in a spiral of obsessive thinking as we are barraged with constant external stimuli. Where is the now? Music is a time-based art. It only exists now, in this moment, and cultivating that mindfulness can be a significant contribution to our busy lives.

It is vitally important to promote consciousness in all areas of our lives: as we practice and perform, as we teach, as we eat, travel, and converse with loved ones or strangers. Repetition is an important tool for learning technique, but we never wish our performances (or our meals or conversations) to be public displays of repeated actions. In his valuable book *The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness*, Gerald Klickstein warns us that repetition can either amplify one's artistry or, when managed poorly, drain the spirit dry. He encourages musicians to take care to instill the “complete tools” needed for an arresting performance each time we practice (Klickstein, p. 51).

Alexander Technician John Hunter describes this high degree of inner activity as “keeping one's options open. In this state it is possible to make a link between one's mental alertness and sensory awareness in such a way that one has a sense of one's own presence; to oneself, to the environment, to the pull of habit and the possibility of the new. Such experiences have to be earned through a process of work on oneself.”

Applied to making music, Hunter describes how to channel this animating force consciously.

“At this stage of awareness, life becomes process—choice, decision, action—from moment to moment. A certain immediacy appears as we experience ourselves as here, now. This quality, quite palpable and recognizable - brings a different quality to one's life. It is also recognizable in others: we call it presence. In performance it brings everything to life. The performer becomes a living bridge between the invisible world of creative intent, the expression of emotion and an audience. Presence calls to presence, and in this way a quite special event can take place during performance.”

When a concert is a shared intimate experience of the present moment between performers and audience, without ego or judgment, the synergy in the room has the power to heal, to transcend mindlessness, and to foster presence in all. In these revolutionary times, we have a special calling as teachers and performers to endorse and develop this consciousness in our evolving culture.

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# Ask Artsmentor

by Dr. Jill Timmons



## About the Author

Jill Timmons, artist-in-residence at Linfield College, is known to international audiences and educators as a leading consultant in arts management through her consulting firm, Artsmentor LLC. Timmons has performed throughout the US, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain and Chile. Dedicated to American composers, her discography includes recordings on the Centaur, Capstone and Laurel labels. In 2012, Oxford University Press will publish her book on music entrepreneurship: *The Musician's Journey—Crafting Your Career Vision and Plan*.

Dear Artsmentor,

My piano students are looking for concrete strategies that can insure a reliable and poised public performance. What kind of preparation do you recommend?

*Pondering in Portland*

Dear *Pondering*:

Your question gets to the heart of how and why we make music. Whether you are an artist/teacher or a student in your apprentice years, you were probably first drawn to music in order to *make* music. Since music is a temporal art form, much of what we encounter in the way of performance is mitigated by a specific point in time. For a confident and well-prepared performance, we need concrete strategies that account for this temporality.

I have found that there are two essential skills to master if we are to have reliable and fulfilling public performances. The first is preparation. This is the bedrock of all concerts. This includes all manner of things such as: score analysis, sufficient study and practice of the work, mastery of all technical demands, comprehensive grounding in performance practice issues, understanding the composer's intention, and one's personal vision of the music. All of these components and more support a fine performance.

Once we arrive at the moment of performance, however, a second skill is essential. The secondary competency that brings forward a fine performance is what I call being fully available to the moment. It's the quality of being completely present in the moment of

the performance to what has been so carefully prepared. As performers, we are poised and focused and we are not distracted by random events in the audience; our own noisy thoughts about mistakes, memory slips, or what external judges might think about the performance. There is no “concentration;” rather we are instead allowing the music to come forward effortlessly, relying upon the solid foundation of our preparation.

For most of us, the preparation component is the easier task to master. We arrive at the piano each day and roll up our sleeves! To be fully available to a performance, however, requires poise and confidence in the temporal moment. In a very real sense, there is no rehearsal for the concert! There is one practice, however, that will train any musician to be more prepared for the temporality of our art form and that is *routine!* In a very real sense it is the essence of the Zen saying, “The way out is through.” The more we enter into the temporality of making music, the more at home we are with all manner of unexpected things. That includes the particulars of a new performance space, good and bad pianos, unpredictable audiences, our own chaotic thoughts, and our own range of performance excellence. Imagine that you played your concert program everyday at noon for your friends or co-workers. On what day would you be completely confident and poised? On what day would you tire of the program? When would your colleagues ask you to stop?

Fine performances are at our fingertips regardless of our level of playing. When we are thoroughly prepared and we have an abundance of experience playing for others, we are confident, highly skilled, and artful in our performances. We eschew any notion of *perfectionism* and instead resonate with the composer. We are able to bring forward the music of both living voices and those who have come before us. And sometimes we even connect with the numinous.



# Coda

*Play the music, not the instrument.*

~ Author Unknown ~

