Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

Composition and the Studio Teacher

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 M.M. from Boston University.

When I started my first year of college, I informed Dr. Richter (in all of my seventeen-year-old wisdom) that I "hated" contemporary music and didn't want to play it. He didn't argue; he just suggested I not close my ears because there was a lot of music out there I had yet to hear. Now, nearly thirty years later, the most exciting part of my work as a performing pianist is playing the music of living composers. I've played premiers, made CDs, and worked side-by-side with composers as we jointly midwife their compositions into the world. There is no thrill quite like it.

This issue of *Oregon Musician* focuses on composers—frequently "unsung heroes" in the world of music teaching. Jan Mittelstaedt writes on teaching composition and Dana Libonati gives tips on teaching songwriting. Gary Noland shares some of the joys and tribulations of being a working composer is today's musical world and Mak Kastelic writes of being part of an ensemble as it works with the composer to prepare a world premier. Dr. Jill Timmons writes on how to introduce yourself to modern music and this issue's featured interview of Arletta O'Hearn focuses on the training, experience, and musical mentoring that goes into creating a good composer and crafting a life.

Most of us will never be a great composers (all my college and graduate school composition assignments came back with variations on the same theme: correct but not terribly interesting), but using the ideas shared by our authors, we can open that door for our students. We can teach new music to our students and give them an opportunity to work directly with the composers. Through our guidance, our students can see that music is not just a beautiful museum, but a living, breathing encounter with the raw elements of creating art. We owe them this thrill.

Composition and the Studio Teacher

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Introducing Students to Composition

By Jan Mittelstaedt, NCTM

About the Author

Jan Mittelstaedt earned degrees from Bucknell University, Marylhurst University, and The University of Portland. President of Cascadia Composers, she is published by Schaum, Alberti, and Music Sales. Selected for the Ernest Bloch Composers Symposium, OMTA Composer of the Year, many ASCAP Plus awards, and a Portland District Lifetime Membership, her biography is in *Who's Who in America.*

When I asked a former student whether she thought that writing compositions in her early years of piano study helped her better understand the advanced music she now plays, she responded, "I understand the music better even though it has been years since I have composed. The process of writing a composition forced me to take every detail into account and know exactly what I wanted the listener to hear." This young woman's words reinforce my belief that composition study is an essential part of music study.

A group of four students of approximately the same age and level provides an ideal setting for teaching composition. It is possible for the students to work at one piano, they learn through interaction with each other, and they have fun. Because beginning composition students need specific perimeters in order to succeed, I like to start with small segments and build from these.

Rhythmic Improvisation activities help stimulate students' imaginations while freeing them of their inhibitions. In guiding a game of *Rhythmic Conversation,* I sit on the floor facing the students who sit in a semi circle. Each of us has a rhythm instrument. After establishing a pulse, I beat a rhythm pattern saying a student's name as I finish my pattern. The child then takes over and improvises a different pattern in the same pulse. Each pattern is a measure in length. The students alternate with me (teacher — student — teacher— different student etc.). After the children are comfortable with this game, a more complex variation may be added. The teacher improvises a longer pattern and then speaks a child's name. The student will continue playing a pattern on her instrument. When s/he is finished, s/he says, "stop." The teacher then takes over and the game continues.

Because students find it easy to notate purely rhythmic compositions, manuscripts can quickly be prepared so that the class is able to play a rhythm ensemble. The teacher assigns the same meter and number of measures to all students. Students spend about 10 minutes composing a

rhythm piece. Then the group works on the performance with each student playing a different part. At first, the teacher acts as a conductor. Later, students take turns directing the "musicians."

Rhythmic Improvisation games are followed by Melodic Improvisation activities. The pentatonic scale is user friendly, because children do not have to worry about logical chord progressions or breaking traditional theory rules. Two to four children line up in front of the piano keyboard. They place left hand fingers 3 and 2 on the small black note group and right hand fingers 2, 3, and 4 on the larger group. If another piano or keyboard is available, the teacher uses it. If not, she also stands in front of the piano that the students are using. The teacher plays a melodic segment and begins a musical conversation with the students.

A relay game also allows children to become familiar with the pentatonic scale and to freely improvise. The children form two parallel lines at the piano. The first student from one line improvises a set number of beats. When s/he has completed her improvisation, the leader of the other line takes over. Meanwhile, the first student goes to the end of her line and the second student becomes the first. The same process is repeated with the second line after the first student has completed his improvisation. Students may experiment with irregular meters, such as 5/4, when playing this game.

As the game progresses, the teacher may ask individuals to improvise certain sounds: a bear rumbling through the forest, birds singing in the meadow, ocean waves and so forth. Or a child could improvise a segment and the other students could discuss how the music makes them feel. I also like to play models for the class. Three of my pentatonic favorites are "Balloons" and "Pagoda" from *Solo Flight* by Elvina T. Pearce (Frances Clark, The New School for Music Study Press, 1986) and "Giggles" by Jan Mittelstaedt from *Solo Snips* (Music Sales America).

For many years, the students and I became frustrated as we struggled to write improvisations on manuscript paper. I spent many hours scribing for students who had to play things over and over while I tried to figure out what they wanted. Finally, I decided on a shorthand approach. Students are given a paper with a picture of the keyboard on the top and manuscript paper under the keyboard. A manuscript book, without clefs, is available from Mel Bay (93773) and a manuscript pad, with clefs, is also printed by Mel Bay (99542). I write finger numbers on the black keys (3-2 and 1-2-3), put a wavy line under the three black key group and an X under the two group. The wavy line and X are symbols for note clusters.

Students begin by writing a rhythmic composition of about eight measures. This is transferred onto the manuscript paper. Students then put the melodic symbols in the

approximate area of the black key groups they wish to use. Octave signs are also used. From the shorthand symbols, the teacher transcribes the symbols into musical notation. Students then copy their piece in standard notation on manuscript paper or prepare the finished copy with a computer notation program.

Step 1

Step 2

A short pentatonic composition may be used as a segment for a longer piece.

The Spy

Seriously

Angelina Shao

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Most of my students have written suites or pieces in ABA form. Anything longer seems overwhelming. In guiding students to write a suite, I offer activities to help them become familiar with the whole tone scale.

Introducing Students to Composition

Hopperonie

Lively

Manali Yavatkar

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After about eight measures have been completed, the students write a third segment using either the pentatonic or whole tone scale. If students wish to create a suite, the two pentatonic or whole tone segments become the first and last sections. The suite is further unified by title and subtitles.

Another scale that works well for a segment is the Dorian Mode built on white keys (D). Students who have experimented with this mode have more choices of segments to combine. They may even choose to write a composition in rondo or arch form.

There are other approaches to the teaching of composition. Some may work better with individuals than the one I have outlined above. In previous years, one teacher had great success when she had her students work from compositions they were studying for performance. These compositions (often from a lower syllabus division) would be studied in depth. Then the students would start making changes by using variation techniques. For example, they might change the meter and note values but keep the melody line intact. Or, the original melody might also be transposed to a new key, appear in retrograde, inversion, retrograde inversion, augmentation or diminution. The advantage of working in this way is that the students are bound to the form and structure of the original piece. If no perimeters are given, students may ramble on and on producing compositions that appear to be a hodgepodge of unrelated ideas. It may be very desirable for very young students to write a limited number of measures this way, as the result may be small gems of great creativity. However, I have also had students write very awkward compositions, and other students have thrown up their hands in frustration saying, “I can’t think of anything,” when they have just been given a blank piece of manuscript paper and asked to compose.

Introducing Students to Composition

Students may also write an original phrase and then apply variation techniques, such as the ones described above, to lengthen the phrase. This method of composing is especially beneficial for students who "can't think of anything." The following is an example of a segment that became part of a short suite:

Bagpipers

Like a March

Katie Mc Giffin

Simple bass constructed from harmonic fifths

measures 1-4 in retrograde

measures 5 - 8 in retrograde

Another way of teaching composition is to work from a poem. Some poems, provide a framework that could result in very interesting rhythms. For example, consider the nursery rhyme, "Thirty Days Hath September." Several different rhythmic patterns might be derived from this poem. The student could start with a rhythmic composition and then add a melody. The melody could be based on a synthetic scale (one that the student creates). And, an ostinato bass line could be written for the left hand.

I have had luck in guiding students in writing counterpoint by creating rounds. The students write original melodies which become "leaders." Then they pick places for followers to start. For example, the leader may be written for the pianist's right hand. That melody is then copied in the bass clef for the left hand. If the leading melody is diatonic and simple, the following melody may work without any changes. If it doesn't work, however, some notes in the second melody may be changed.

Once I had a very lucky teaching experience. I was walking down the stairs to my studio for a theory class without any idea of what I was going to do with the children. As I entered the room, I decided that the students might write a play. Miraculously, they were very excited, and a play, "Candyland," eventually resulted which included six musical numbers for piano and voice. The students performed it for their parents. Some played

the piano while others sang and acted the parts. And, the children loved writing the play. We started with the words for the songs and spoken parts and then added the music. Fortunately, I had some gifted students in the group. The following is an excerpt from one of the numbers:

The Chase

#1

Ted Case

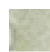
Maddy Case and Hannah Neal

Lively ♩. = 72

We're tak-ing a walk with Bub-ble Gum. Where's the leash, his haun-ches are numb.

There goes Su-gar. She seems to be scared. And af-ter her, Bub-ble, with his nos-trils flared.

There are many ways to approach teaching composition. Working in groups allows students to motivate and support one another, listen to each other's compositions, and offer ideas when a member of the group becomes stuck. Group lessons may become supplements to individual lessons. Students might meet once a month or every week for a short period of time. Some teachers have offered music camps during the summer. Composition may be part of these camps. In one or two weeks, students have time to complete a composition and might even perform it. Or, teachers may take a few minutes at each weekly lesson for composition. Improvisation and/or composition can be coupled with syllabus musicianship skills. For example, a student could be given an assignment of writing a melody line using the chord progression s/he is studying. No matter how it is taught, I believe that the study of composition gives students a greater understanding of their performance pieces and of music in general.



Introducing Students to Songwriting

By Dana Libonati

About the Author

Dana Libonati is a published songwriter, composer and arranger as well as a professional jazz pianists and teacher. He is the songwriting instructor at Young Musicians and Artists summer camp, is the choral director at McMinnville High School and adjunct professor of music at Chemeketa Community College.

Today's piano studio of 2013, in many cases, looks quite similar to the piano studio of 1913. Similarly, the music conservatory methodology employed by many colleges and universities remains unchanged. Why do formally-trained musicians resist change? In my opinion it is that we fear the unknown. For many of us the idea of teaching jazz piano, improvisation, composition or songwriting is frightening simply because we lack knowledge about these topics. Many of our students, however, have interest in these subjects, particularly songwriting. Provided below are step-by-step instructions on how to incorporate popular songwriting into your piano studio.

Step One: Begin teaching the art of songwriting by defining the three basic elements of all songs — harmony, melody and lyrics. These elements are the same ones employed by Franz Schubert to compose art songs and Rodgers and Hammerstein to compose songs for their Broadway musicals.

The first element is composing harmony, or chords, so start by teaching the seven diatonic triads in a major key (I-ii-iii-IV-V-vi-viio). Triads are enough for beginning songwriters, but feel free to include seventh chords, especially the V7 chord. Teach students to play the triad (and seventh chord) in the right hand near middle C while playing the root note in the bass with the left hand. Make sure they understand the importance of the I (tonic) chord, and that the V and V7 are very active and want to move back to the I chord.

The next element of songwriting is melody, which is a single set of notes moving horizontally. The beginning songwriter will likely create melody lines that repeat the same note over and over. Teach them about melodic contour and shape, and show them how to move up and down by steps ("Yesterday" by the Beatles and the Christmas song "Joy to the World") and then by leaps ("The Star Spangled Banner").

Introducing Students to Songwriting

Lastly, the songwriter must create lyrics. Basic lyrical concepts include placing accented syllables on strong beats. Provide a simple rhythmic pattern and ask your students to create lyrics to fit the pattern. Next teach them about simile and metaphor. Take a basic idea and ask the student to express the idea using simile and metaphor.

Once students understand the three basic elements of songwriting, they will likely ask what element should be written first. Many songwriters compose the chords and melody line first then create lyrics. Others start by writing lyrics. Some songwriters, like Elton John, are comfortable working either way. Elton often creates the music first then gives it to his lyricist Bernie Taupin, but he's also comfortable writing chords and melody from lyrics already created by Taupin. Encourage your students to experiment with the process and see what appeals to them.

Step Two: Contemporary songwriting follows some very basic concepts. The first of these is the concept of chord sequences, which is easy to teach once your students understand the seven diatonic triads. Chord sequences have been around for hundreds of years and you can use Pachelbel's "Canon in D" as an example. The chord sequence from the Canon is I-V-vi-iii-IV-I-IV-V. Chord sequences that end on the V chord want to return to the beginning. The Beatles cover of "Twist and Shout" utilizes a the common chord sequence I-IV-V, and their cover of "Please Mr. Postman" employs another standard chord sequence I-vi-IV-V.

Begin teaching chord sequences by asking your students to create their own four-chord sequence. This is easier than it appears. Ask them to start with the I chord and end with the V chord. This, of course, means that they only need to select the second and third chords of the sequence. A four chord sequence, with one chord per measure, creates a four-measure phrase, which is the most typical phrase length in popular music. Have them play the sequence a few times in 4/4 time so that you can insure they understand how to play one chord per measure. Next have them try the sequence in 3/4 time and 6/8 time.

Once your student has created a four-chord sequence, ask them to sing or hum a melody over the sequence. The best melodies consist of mostly chord tones (notes that belong to the chord) and fewer (if any) non-chord tones. This exercise may require a few attempts. Once a melody is established, feel free to help edit the melody by again discussing melodic contour and phrase shaping. Write the melody on staff paper and ask the student to create lyrics to fit the rhythm of the melody. Show them where the strong beats are and encourage them to place strong syllables on those notes. It is not important that these lyrics be poetry, just that they understand the concept of putting lyrics to melodic rhythms. They have now created four-measures of a popular song, containing harmony, melody and lyrics.

Step Three: Once your student understand Steps One and Two you can introduce them to the basic elements of contemporary song form. Form is another concept that

has been around for hundreds of years, and you can use historical examples like the exposition, development and recapitulation (ABA) of sonata form to help teach the concept. There are three main sections to most contemporary songs — verse, chorus and bridge. The order of the sections is flexible, and up to the songwriter.

Typical verses contain a repeated chord sequence but different lyrics for each new verse. In other words, all verses may contain the identical four-chord sequence (e.g. I-IV-ii-V), but each verse will contain different lyrics. The chorus to a popular song is the most important section. A typical chorus will be the same every time it is performed within the song. It will contain the same chord sequence and the same lyrics every time. A chorus will also include the hook, which is a memorable, catchy word or phrase that is repeated many times. Michael Jackson repeated the hook "beat it" dozens of times in his hit song. Hooks are an essential part of contemporary songwriting. Often the hook is also the title of the song. Ask your students to create a couple of hooks. Encourage young songwriters to go up higher in the vocal range with the melody line to their chorus. This helps set it apart from the melody of the verse.

The final main section of a popular song is the bridge. The bridge utilizes a new chord sequence and new lyrics and is typically only played once. Not all songs contain a bridge, but a good bridge can break up the monotony of verse-chorus-verse-chorus. Encourage songwriters to be creative with their chord sequence to the bridge by using a chord sequence in a different key.

Popular songs also include two other minor sections, which are typically drawn from the chord sequences of the verse or the chorus. The first of these sections is the introduction, which is usually purely instrumental. The introduction appears at the beginning of the song, and may also appear later in the song as an interlude between the chorus and a verse. A simple way to create an introduction is to play the chord sequence of the verse prior to starting the verse. The second minor section is the instrumental solo section, which is often comprises of improvisation over the chords of the verse or chorus. Solo sections are utilized for the same purpose as the bridge, as a means of breaking up the repetition of verse-chorus-verse-chorus.

Finally, teach the concept of song mapping. Listen to a few popular songs and map out the order of the sections using the first letter of each section. This is an essential exercise in making sure your students understand form. A typical song might be intro-verse-verse-chorus-verse-chorus-solo-bridge-chorus-chorus, and the map would look like I-V-V-C-V-C-S-B-C-C. Make sure that you pick examples where the form is clear and the sections are easy to identify.

Step Four: There are a number of standard topics, or song types for popular songs. The most common is the love song, which is over-used and typically lacks creativity. If your student wants to write about the subject of love, encourage them to take a creative approach to love. Have the student write about someone who is in love, but the

object of their affections is in love with someone else. You might suggest the topic of when love dies, or dealing with the end of a relationship. Another twist would be writing about the attempt to understand the complexities of love, or why people are attracted to each other.

Story songs and social comment songs are two of my favorite song types. Story songs, of course, tell a story. The story can be a life story, an event story, or a famous folk tale. Have your students listen to “Lying Eyes” by The Eagles, “Scenes at an Italian Restaurant” by Billy Joel, and “Night Owls” by Little River Band. Social comment songs provide the songwriters perspective on a social, political, religious, or other issue. “Fragile” is Sting’s perspective on war, and “You Haven’t Done Nothin” is Stevie Wonder’s opinion of former president Richard Nixon. “Only the Good Die Young” is Billy Joel’s perspective of the Catholic Church, and in “Eleanor Rigby” Paul McCartney tells of the sorrows of being lonely.

Adding songwriting to your piano curriculum will provide variety to your studio and will excite many of your students. Songwriting taps into the creative energies of your students, and connects them to an entirely new part of their talents and energies. The steps above provide enough information for you to get started teaching songwriting in your studio.

Ramblings, Observations, Advice and Invective from a Portland Composer

by Gary Noland

About the Author

Gary Noland's catalogue consists of over 400 works, which include piano, vocal, chamber, experimental and electronic pieces, full-length plays in verse, "chamber novels," and graphically notated scores. His compositions have been performed and broadcast on four continents. Six CDs of his works are available on NPM at: www.northpacificmusic.com.

I appreciate being asked to write this article on composition. I'll do my utmost to tone down the invective. Although there are many elephants in the room, I'll refrain from mentioning names or pointing fingers. We know who they are and they know who they are . . .

A couple of years ago I received a call from a young gentleman who'd come across a copy of my "39 Variations on an Original Theme in F Major" for piano (Op. 98) at the home of a Portland pianist for whom he was then house- sitting. This is a work of approximately 100 minutes duration that demands a player of extreme stamina and almost impossible virtuosic skill. The piece ends with a thirty-five-page fugue. I was raised on the Goldberg's, the Diabelli's and, later, Fred Rzewski's monumental set of variations on Sergio Ortega's anthem, *¡El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!*; thus I was acutely conscious of what I was up against in terms of attempting to one-up my formidable predecessors. When I passed this score along to Marc-André Hamelin with the claim (verifiable until proven otherwise) that it's the longest set of piano variations in the history of the genre, he raised an eyebrow.

The gentleman who contacted me, having inferred from the afore-cited score that I was a "real composer," requested a composition lesson. Upon expressing to me that one of his worst anxieties was that his music might sound too much like Brahms (or any other composer for that matter), I had to tell him, frankly, that, if such were the case, it would be the very least of his worries, for it would indicate (if his claim could be supported by evidence) that he was already a composer of the first rank, in which case I ought to be taking lessons from *him* and not the other way around. The only composers I can think of who sound even *remotely* like Brahms have written music that's well-established in the repertory (e.g., Ernst von Dohnanyi, who's been described as "Brahms on steroids," Amy Beach, early Richard Strauss and early Ernst Toch, among others). There's a world of difference

between “sounding like Brahms” and sounding like an unskilled novice trying to *avoid* sounding like Brahms. If one does a study of juvenilia by composers whose opuses have made it into the canon, one will find, more than not, that such works are competent emulations of the styles of their predecessors (see, for example: Bach, Bartok, Beethoven, Berg, Chopin, Debussy, Hindemith, Ligeti, Rochberg, Rossini, Schoenberg, Schubert, Schulhoff, Scriabin, Shostakovich, Strauss, Stravinsky, Szymanowski, Toch, Webern, Weill, *et al*). Whatever “individuality” emerges in the music of such composers happens more as a result of their supreme technical skill than any self-conscious effort—if I might be vouchsafed the use of a catchword from the annals of textbook psychobabble—to “be themselves.”

The anxiety of sounding like someone else is by no means uncommon amongst aspirant composers, and therein lies a critical problem pertaining to the indoctrination that occurs within the padded walls of the Academy. For countless generations composers have been brainwashed by their teachers into fancying that the only way their music can achieve integrity on any level is if they “find their own voices.” I was subjected to this party line over and over again throughout college, graduate school, and in the real world. I’m experienced enough now to know that this way of thinking is fallacious and perverse in the extreme; it is, in essence, an institutionally condoned “cop-out”—a license for laziness. The fact of the matter is: it’s a hundred times harder to sound like someone else than to sound like oneself. That we possess our own voices is a matter of genetics: we’re born with them. We’re not, however, born with the motivation (read: fanaticism) and work ethic to do what’s required to perfect our craft and cultivate our musical tastes. (Incidentally, good craft and good taste don’t always coincide—not infrequently those with taste have no skill and vice versa, in part attributable to the furrowing of idiots savants at conservatories and eggheads devoid of chops at universities.) A high level of technical mastery (which, by default, presupposes a creative imagination) is the key to achieving authenticity. Anyone who can compose “like” or “as well as” Brahms has the means at their disposal (and credibility into the bargain) to do whatever they please. If you don’t have this level of craft, you’re not a composer. This is why Schoenberg was taken seriously in his time. (In the case of Boulez, it may have more to do with his phenomenal ears than anything else.)

I once had a brief conversation with a well-known theorist who said to me, “I could bang out a fugue everyday if I wanted to, but what would be the point?” Perhaps that’s true, and if it is, he’s depriving the world of hundreds, maybe thousands, of fugues (whether or not they’re any good is anybody’s guess). Of course, there’s a major difference between boasting one can do something and actually doing it (as, I believe, John Cage pointed out when someone said to him, “Anyone can do *that!*”). I can’t imagine this particular theorist will be eulogized for the thousands of fugues he *could have* written . . .

We live in times when critics and members of prize committees tell us that “so-and-so” has an “original voice” when said party has done nothing more than reinvent the wheel (if that), for what the critics and committee members bestow their stamp of approval on has little to do with the constitutional integrity of the works they judge. It

astonishes me how depraved such judgments often turn out to be, even at the highest level, when the prize in question can make a difference between launching a career or plunging a worthy contender into a slough of despond. Winning or not winning is a matter of life and death. Sometimes I'll read that such-and-such a composer won the "Whiffenpoof" Prize or a "Ferschlugginer" Grant. Out of curiosity, I'll go online to investigate, whereupon I'll scratch my head and ask myself, "Am I *missing* something . . .?"

I've been personally acquainted with a number of music reviewers, many of whom are well-meaning, good-hearted, salt-of-the-earth types. Several years ago I went to Powell's to hear Alex Ross (music critic for the New Yorker) plug his (then) new book *The Rest is Noise*. I must have counted (including myself) four or five composers in attendance. It occurred to me afterwards, inasmuch as I found his talk engaging, that in a perfect world things would have gone down differently, namely: Mr. Ross would have attended a concert of music by Portland composers and written it up in his next review. Since when do music critics have greater stature than the composers they feed on? Do conductors of symphony orchestras know the composers in their communities? Like as not. You can rest assured: they know who the critics are!

When I was an insecure, inarticulate undergraduate, I once got into an argument with a composition professor at a prestigious university. I posed the question to him (a no-brainer I assumed): "If a composer comes along and writes, say, *The B Flat Minor Mass* and if said work is in the style of, and of the same level of quality as, Bach's *B Minor Mass* (a universally acknowledged masterpiece), would *The B Flat Minor Mass* have any validity . . .? Of course, deep down I knew the answer to this poser. Be that as it might, the professor was adamant in the negativity of his retort, which was something to the effect that the music would be "worthless" and there would be no point in embarking upon such an asinine undertaking. I wasn't rhetorically sharp enough to hold my ground against such a smug polemic but nevertheless knew I was right in believing that his "stupinion," not the hypothetical piece (were it ever to be written), had no validity.

Thankfully, I was strong enough not to hurl myself off a bridge, for the patronizing tone in which he delivered his verdict (backed by years of kudos and funding) cast me into a deep depression. I believe it was Nietzsche who wrote, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." For most of my life now I've been fighting a one-man war against the inculcation (i.e., force-feeding) of impressionable minds with such black propaganda by irresponsible mediocrities in positions of power.

There's an amusing clip one can find online (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U) of John Cage being featured on a classic television show called "I've Got a Secret" that was aired in January, 1960, in which he presents a piece called "Water Walk." The performance consists of Cage interacting with various random objects such as radios, a vase of roses, a bathtub, a grand piano, a rubber duck, and so on. The MC appears to be skeptical of Cage's choice of instrumentation and asks him how he would feel if the audience laughed at his performance, to which he responds, "I consider laugh-

ter preferable to tears." When I first encountered this clip, I was won over by Cage's wit and humor until I reflected more deeply on his face-saving response. It occurred to me that most of the music I hold in highest regard is more likely to draw tears from me than laughter . . .

I've been around long enough to witness the landscape of twentieth century music undergo major shifts. I was told that certain "innovative" composers who wrote agonizingly inept, formless, ugly, random, arid, stodgy, boring music were "significant" on account of their "originality." Tellingly, we've witnessed a revival of works by first-rate composers that were not in the canon thirty or forty years ago —works by Korngold (whose spectacular revival is comparable to that of Mahler's some fifty years back), Toch, Schulhoff, Godowsky, Revueltas, Szymanowski, Sorabji, and others—that have become permanent fixtures in the repertoire, while products of the more "fashionable" second-rates from the mid to late twentieth century have faded from the milieu due to a justifiable lack of interest (granted, it's yet to be seen if such sonic sewage withstands the test of time—fat chance, I wager). What we're more likely to see is that what was musicologically endorsed as being "mainstream" thirty to sixty years ago will come to be viewed as a sideshow or footnote.

This brings me to another subject: technology. Increasingly, we're seeing young dotmakers achieving an unprecedented level of "flow" in their compositions on account of their use of computer software to notate their scores and emit note- for-note renditions of the pixels on their screens. I belong to a generation that had to write music from scratch—the "hard way"; we had to hammer things out at the piano and find ways to listen to our efforts as objectively as possible. I had the stick-to-itiveness to do this sort of thing to good effect (I'd spend weeks perfecting a single measure if I had to). It was much easier in those days to "separate the women from the girls," so to speak. Nowadays, when I attend concerts of works by young composers (some as tender as eight or nine), on a peripheral level their compositional exertions sound leagues more "impressive" than the stuff I heard at grad composition seminar concerts thirty years ago (which were dreary affairs, to be sure). In those days composers relied on the limitations of their ears and their techniques as instrumentalists; consequently, their efforts on paper were, for the most part, inept. The danger of all this access to technological tools that eliminate the drudgery of putting ideas down on paper is that it's now possible for amateur composer wannabes with little training or skill (as evidenced by their shoddy voice-leading, impoverished sense of structure, and a pervasive noodly modalness reminiscent of the schlock they listen to) to slickly package their junk and fool committees into believing there's actual merit in what they do. Some of these dotmaking invertebrates—"Little-Johnny-One-Chords," passive-aggressive dweezles out to exact their revenge on society by composing the most hideous imaginable atonal dreck, and/or overindulged suburban morons venting their "ersatz angst"—go on to have "reputations" on account of being cunning self- promoters, wangling distinguished prizes for themselves, and so on. At

best, their wallpaper-like endeavors exude an occasional element of monkey-at-the-typewriter "cleverness" that might engage an audience for a split second but seldom has the capacity to coax repeated hearings—the music's all too often D.O.A. As an audience member, I get impatient with having to pretend to admire arcane musical puns, tongue-in-cheek turns of phrase, fancy-dancy riffs, et cetera. Ultimately, I want to be moved (i.e., transported) by what I hear. I can count on perhaps three hands the number of times I've had the good fortune to catch a new work presented that affected me in such a way.

I'm convinced there's as much latent musical talent *per capita* in the present era as at any other time in history. However, the reason we're not producing Mozarts and Beethovens (or any known works that possess that element of what John Adams calls "gravitas") is because of the survival pressures imposed upon artists in a consumer-driven economy that impel them, in moments of weakness, to call attention to themselves by resorting to cheap gimmicks, parlor tricks, special effects, and so on. I can say this with authority on account of having myself been guilty of such meaningless experimentation. Ironically, some of my own ghastliest enterprises (including a 200-page underground comic book I had the audaciousness to call an "opera") have attracted more interest than my worthier productions. It would seem, then, that in order to survive as an *artiste*, one has to make pacts with every conceivable devil that comes along. American culture tends to favor obnoxious extroverts who are adroit at drawing attention to themselves.

Many of the most accomplished composers I know are all thumbs when it comes to marketing their wares and for that reason remain on the fringes insofar as garnering the recognition they so eminently deserve.

I will name several first-rate (or "first-rate second-rate") composers, most of whom are still with us, whose music should, in my humble opinion, be taken seriously. Some are well-known, others relatively obscure: William Alwyn, Edward Artemiev, Lera Auerbach, the Currier brothers (Nathan & Sebastian), Paul Dessau, Gottfried von Einem, Noam Elkies, Joseph Fennimore, Michael Finnissy, Marc- André Hamelin, Ladislav Kupkovic, Fred Lerdahl, Robert Levin, Henry Martin, George Rochberg, Poul Ruders, Frederic Rzewski, Paul Schoenfield, Hsueh-Yung Shen, Tison Street, David Del Tredici, George Tsontakis, Hiromi Uehara, and two Oregonians—Victor Steinhardt and Tomas Svoboda.

One more self-corroding paradox I want to point out here is that politically infused terms such as "radical" and "conservative" are often misapplied to composers and their oeuvres. Some music organizations that think of themselves as "revolutionary" are anything but that, and some composers who are labeled as "cutting-edge" write the most insufferably pedestrian music. Conversely, there are others pigeonholed as being "conventional" who are groundbreaking innovators.

Go do the math—*nothing* adds up!

Composing a Life: An Interview with Composer, Teacher, and Jazz Pianist Arletta O'Hearn, NCTM

by Rhonda Ringering, NCTM

Aretta O'Hearn, NCTM

It has been said that some composers are born knowing how to write music. Most other composers come to their art through life experiences, innate talent, and the mentoring of caring teachers. As Arletta O'Hearn and I sat down at her kitchen table with cups of coffee to chat about her career, it became evident that without the guidance of her teachers—most prominently the late Aurora Underwood—O'Hearn's beautiful jazz pieces might never have been written.

Arletta (Wendel) O'Hearn was born in a Cresco, Iowa—a town she says no one has ever heard of—located about thirty miles from the Mississippi river. She grew up on a farm and was eleven years old when the family moved into town and she was able to start taking piano lessons. At age sixteen, the family moved to Eugene, Oregon and it was there that O'Hearn met the teacher who would be one of the most important guiding influences in her career.

"I attended the University of Oregon for one year to study with Aurora Underwood," O'Hearn recalls. "The first year I was there, Aurora was on sabbatical and I studied with someone else. The substitute didn't know how to teach anyone but advanced students. He couldn't see the yearning in my soul to play. He was there for graduate work and was too young. He couldn't teach me."

The experience of working with that teacher was so unpleasant that O'Hearn did not re-enroll. When Aurora came back from her sabbatical, O'Hearn went to study with her at her home. In addition to her piano studies, she took a job and went to work.

"Aurora was wonderful," O'Hearn states. "She knew immediately what I needed: corrective surgery. She immediately corrected my technique. She was a wonderful teacher and she had such a strong emphasis on technique. She insisted on good technique and she developed it. She whipped me into shape. She had faith in me. When you were in a lesson with her, she made you feel you were all she was thinking about."

O'Hearn kept working her job and taking private piano lessons. It was right after World War II and the University of Portland hired Underwood to be part of the new music

department they were creating. In 1947, Underwood had one of the priests call O'Hearn and recruit her to the new program.

"The priest said, 'We would like to build up the women in our music department. Mrs. Underwood said you would be a good candidate. Get on the bus, come on up, and I'll meet you and show you around.' They went out and found me a room to stay in because there were no dorms for women at that time. I had a little money saved. I quit my job, enrolled in the program, and I went to work in a job they gave me typing up index cards for their library. I stayed for four years, graduating with a Bachelor of Music degree."

While in the music program, O'Hearn became an active accompanist and in that capacity had the opportunity to work with string students, voice students, and the choir. Her favorite class was composition, which she had a flair for, but was writing in the classical style. She also made life-long friendships with the five other women who were fellow music majors. The University of Portland gave her a full ride until her last year when they got a new president.

While at university, O'Hearn also got into the drama department. It was there that she learned the importance of being able to transpose music.

"We were doing The Drunkard," O'Hearn recalls. "One of the singers had been singing with jazz bands in the army. He wanted to sing 'The Man who broke the Bank at Monte Carlo' but he couldn't sing it in the key written and asked me to transpose it. I couldn't do it. In our theory courses we did progressions and analysis. I thought I had to transpose every note. I didn't know there was another way. Had I had more jazz experience I would have gone through quickly and turned it into a lead sheet. I felt so sorry that I could not transpose a song for this singer and he was forced to sing it is a key that was not comfortable for him."

O'Hearn met her husband Pat—a saxophonist—at the University of Portland. They got married after graduation and joined a theatre company because her sister was a lead in it (an ingénue) and they needed an accompanist for their shows. The company was based in Virginia City, Montana and they performed all period plays—very serious productions and variety shows. O'Hearn's husband was the male lead and she was able to create background music for these turn of the century shows. As with many organizations, however, problems arose.

"When we got to Phoenix to do our winter stock," O'Hearn says, "the wife of the director fell in love with one of the actors. The director was so upset, he went back to Montana and the theatre program folded. We were trying to figure out what to do next. We went to the next big city: Los Angeles. I got a job as a typist. The boys sold several pints of blood for money for groceries until they got jobs!"

Once settled in Los Angeles, O'Hearn's husband wanted to play gigs and do theater work. He had an old fake book by Warren Black and sat Arletta down at the piano and had her learn all the tunes.

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"He said, 'Arletta, you've had all this training. Let's get you to sit down and play some dance music." O'Hearn continues. "He could tell me if the chords were right or wrong. He got me started playing from lead sheets and he would play sax along with me. We found a woman named Helene Mirich who taught jazz and I worked with her for 3–4 months. One day she called and told me she had a gig for me. I was thrown into playing with drums and bass. It put me on the spot. What a wonderful experience."

Arletta and Pat stayed in Los Angeles for 10 years and during that time they had two children, Patrick (now bassist/composer in Nashville), and Teresa (a human resources manager and part-time vocalist). Pat took a day job and Arletta kept playing gigs. Her jazz teacher Helene sent her out to play solo piano gigs and that was really difficult. People wanted to hear the songs sung so she learned to sing and play. After a decade, a shared love of the northwest led the family back Portland where Arletta tried to find an agent right away and get some gigs. Her third child, Robert (now a Portland pianist/composer) was born, Pat had another day job, and O'Hearn did some playing around town.

"I looked up Aurora right away," O'Hearn says. "I was overjoyed to see her; she had this great sense of humor. I was playing a gig at a hotel over near Lloyd Center in a lounge called the Kon Tiki Room. I told her I was going to be working a single over there and she said, 'Oh, we'll come and see you.' She showed up with Carla Vincent, Aurora

All of O'Hearn's compositions can be found at www.kjos.com

Blues & Other Colors (O'Hearn) - WP184 / $3.45

Christmas Jazzed Up (O'Hearn) - WP368 / $3.95

Christmas Riches (O'Hearn) - WP331 / $3.45

Christmas Seasonings (O'Hearn) - WP158 / $3.45

Golden Classic Sing-Alongs (O'Hearn) - WP398 / $4.95

In A Jazz Groove (O'Hearn) - WP152 / $3.45

Jazz Action (O'Hearn) - WP367 / $3.95

Jazz Cruise (O'Hearn) - WP542 / $4.45

Jazz Introspectives (O'Hearn) - WP544 / $4.45

Jazz Theme And Variations For Two Pianos (O'Hearn) - WP89 / $6.50Jazz Together (O'Hearn) - WP120 / $3.45

Love Jazz (O'Hearn) - WP80 / $3.95

Lullaby For The Holy Child (O'Hearn) - 8878 / $1.30

Psalm 27 - Trust In God (O'Hearn) - 8909 / $1.30

Suite Talk (O'Hearn) - WP333 / $4.95

Sunshine And Blues (O'Hearn) - WP84 / $3.95

Swing Street (O'Hearn) - WP306 / $3.45

Three Piano Preludes In Jazz Stylings (O'Hearn) - WP141 / $3.95

Underwood, Lillian Pettibone, Maude Sardam. They got a table right in front of the piano, ordered martinis, and had a great time!"

When her son Robert got to be 8 years old she could see he was going to be a pianist. He gravitated to the piano. She called Aurora, who immediately took him as a student and he developed great technique. One day after his lesson, Aurora said, "Robert loves to improvise; why don't you write something for him?"

"I thought, 'I guess I could do that,'" O'Hearn recalls. "So, I did. I wrote a little piece. Aurora liked it a lot. So I wrote a couple more. After while I thought, 'If people like them, why don't I try to get them published?' I put about ten of them together and I printed up a book of my own. I did it all by hand. I went to the art supply store and got rub-on transfer notes. Every page took me about a day. I published a little book with a blue cover. Dorothy Fahlman was going up to Alaska to do workshops. She took some with her and sold some up there!"

Motivated by positive responses, O'Hearn called publishers and asked them if they were accepting new compositions and who their keyboard editors were. She copyrighted her pieces herself and mailed them to several of the major publishers. She thought Willis would be a good choice, but they were not accepting new submissions. For six months or more she never got a response from Kjos. Finally she picked up the phone, called the keyboard editor, and was told, "It is interesting that you called; we are going to go ahead and publish it."

"After that they took most everything I sent them and I wrote quite a bit: solo, two-piano, Christmas—I think I have about 17 collections out there. Then I kind of ran out if ideas. At that point I was playing at St. Pius Catholic Church and I wrote several pieces for choir liturgical music, SATB, and two have been published by Kjos."

In her teaching, O'Hearn relies heavily on the Syllabus program. She also insists each student have a strong understanding of the harmonic structure of the pieces they are playing and will point to chords and ask the student to identify them. Most of her students prefer to do regular syllabus, but for those interested in learning jazz, she starts with the blues and sings them Elvis' "You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog" as her first example.

When asked about her most rewarding professional accomplishment, O'Hearn mentions, "Hearing my music sung by a choir the first time. That was 15 years ago. A lot of piano students play my piano pieces on YouTube but some of them are so badly done that it is painful to hear. One kid on YouTube played my Prelude #3 so well, however, that I emailed him and said, 'you play that better than I do!'

When asked about her composing process, O'Hearn claims she relied on both melody and chords. Sometimes the melody came first, other times the chord progression sparked a melody. William Gillock, who was once on the board of Clavier Companion, wrote her a letter and said, "Arletta, creating a melody is a gift. You cannot contrive it; it was to be intuitive. You have that gift."

Composing a Life: An Interview with Composer, Teacher, and Jazz Pianist Arletta O'Hearn, NCTM

"How do we get a gift of melody?" O'Hearn asks. "I played so many jazz tunes from the 30s and 40s that had all those gorgeous melodies. As a kid I sang in choirs. I was exposed to jazz standards. When creating jazz pieces for students, I relied most on melody. For choir pieces, I started with the lyrics. It all goes into that creative pot from childhood."

O'Hearn's creative journey has been one filled with study, discovery, and an open-minded embrace of many styles of music. Her solid classical training combined with real-world jazz playing experience has resulted in well-crafted, pedagogically sound compositions that are doorways through which classical piano students can enter the world of jazz. Through hard work and moxie, training and exploration, and the unwavering support of a mentor teacher, O'Hearn's gift of melody has been appreciated by teacher and students everywhere. It is a gift passed on to our students every time we teach her pieces.

New Voices

by Mak Kastelic

Mak Kastelic is a pianist, organist, and teacher, recently moved to Portland where he currently acts as Director of Music Ministry at Saints Peter and Paul Episcopal Church. He currently resides in Southeast Portland with his wife and two cats, periodically annoying the neighbors with accordion music.

Take the time (right now, dear reader!) to bring a favored composition to mind. Now, imagine performing this distinguished piece of music as one of its original players during its premier, and having the opportunity to work directly with the composer in the rehearsal process. What an experience! I often envy the players and performers who had the honor of presenting some of the greatest music in Western culture. I, myself, would love to have premiered a piano work by Robert Schumann or to be in the premier orchestra for Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" (who doesn't want to start a riot with classical music?). Though the composer receives the acclaim rather than the players, the support of the players in the composing process is crucial. Players and performers of original works are the first to bring the composer's delicate musical thoughts to conceptual realization, presenting the new and unheard composition to the world.

In my senior year at Eastern Washington University, I was given the opportunity to be one of these honored yet nameless players—an opportunity I would not dream of refusing. Our University choir had been invited to sing in the world premier of "Mass with Orchestra", a work composed by Portland-born composer, Vijay Singh. Singh's musical roots are in Oregon where earned his B.M. in Music Education (in both Clarinet and Voice) from Willamette University, and Master's degree from Portland State University in Choral Conducting and Vocal Performance. He currently teaches choir, voice, and jazz at Central Washington University where he continues to gain attention for his solo and choral performances, masterclasses, and guest conductorships. His composition "Mass with Orchestra" was selected for a world premier performance at the Lincoln Center by esteemed

director Jonathan Griffith of DCINY (Distinguished Concerts International New York). We budding college musicians were elated with such a performance opportunity.

Our school choir was set to join two other Washington University choirs (Central and Western) in the performance, accompanied by a professional New York-based orchestra, with Griffith conducting. All three choirs had respectively learned the guts of the piece before arriving in New York, but had never rehearsed the work together before arriving. To intensify the experience, we were told rehearsal time with the orchestra was limited. The choir spent the next two days in rigorous rehearsal with Griffith, while Vijay gave necessary compositional notes and clarification. Our final rehearsal took place the next day in Alice Tully Hall, now adding in both orchestra and soloists. Later that evening, all the parts necessary to make Singh's music come to life were in place and prepared. Needless to say, the performance went off without a hitch, prompting multiple standing ovations from the audience.

A performer willing to work with composers acts partly as collaborator, and partly as interpreter of the composer's inmost musical expressions. As this is a delicate process, it is crucial for both performers and composers to actively seek collaboration with another for the betterment of the music's inherent beauty. Support local performers and composers, and support the work they create. Who knows? It may lead to worldwide music history!

Ask Artsmentor

by Dr. Jill Timmons

About the Author

Jill Timmons, professor emerita at Linfield College, performs internationally as a solo and ensemble artist and has recorded on the Laurel, Centaur, and Capstone labels. She is the author of: *The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Vision and Plan* (Oxford University Press, March 2013). You can find her in her Lake Oswego studio teaching, practicing, or writing her next book!

Dear Artsmentor,

Contemporary music is not my strength. How can I effectively include it in my teaching and interest my students?

Traditional in Terrebone

Dear *Traditional*,

Many of the clients I have encountered over the years have echoed a similar sentiment. Some have even expressed little or no interest in contemporary music. My response? If you don't like the modern era then you haven't explored it sufficiently. There is truly something for everyone whether it is tonality, atonality, serialism, aleatoric works, jazz, music from distant shores, or the fun of non-traditional notation and techniques. But beyond personal taste is the opportunity to engage students in music of their own time. Many of my students have been excited to play repertoire that requires innovative tools and skills. And if the composer is living, one can make direct contact regarding musical questions!

When we leave the confines of the common practice era we often encounter a new musical language with its own vocabulary. With the piano, for example, we may find ourselves *inside* the piano. We may be asked to produce novel sounds: tone clusters, plucked strings, colors from the "prepared piano." Composers make ask us to use the sostenuto or damper pedals in ways that create fresh and vibrant textures. Sometimes we are invited to be a partner with the composer in the compo-

sition itself through the process of indeterminacy or improvisation. Each performance will offer, in a sense, a "new composition."

The students we teach need a much larger pallet than just the works of the common practice period. I am reminded of Franz Liszt who was deeply committed to contemporary music. In performance he regularly championed the works of Berlioz and Wagner among others. He encouraged his students to do the same. In my own experience I have had the honor and joy of recording works by living composers. There is no substitute for that effervescent conversation an artist can have with a living composer.

If you are searching for the right teaching materials, your professional organizations such as the Music Teachers National Association and the College Music Society are great places to start. Even a cursory online search will provide you with countless anthologies from which to choose. Industry publications such as *Clavier Companion* as well as online journals frequently have reviews of new works and composers. Mainstream publishers are a good source for new ideas as well. There are many fine publishers offering contemporary music with the highest standards: Oxford University Press, Alfred, Kjos, Hal Leonard, Hildegard, MCA, and Dover among others.

I relish the modern era and the rich kaleidoscope of styles and composers that is available. There are marvelous works by superb composers and countless opportunities for the seasoned professional to discover fresh musical voices. I encourage you to champion those works and composers from the modern era that speak to you. At the same time, try something new, expand your taste, and advocate for your composer colleagues. You are likely to find a stimulating jump-start to your work!

Coda

HTTP:// EUGE.CA

TWELVE-TONE SUDOKU