

# Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

## Transformation Through Music: A Kaleidoscopic View

The Editor's Comments



### About the Editor

Diane Baxter, pianist, educator and consultant, is the new editor of *Oregon Musician*. She is currently Professor of Music at Western Oregon University where she has received the *Faculty Honors Award for Outstanding Creativity* and the *Pastega Award for Excellence in Teaching*. Diane teaches studio piano and courses in Ethnomusicology, Performance Anxiety, and Research Methods. Off campus Diane consults and performs far and wide, often giving workshops on doing our best under pressure. "The Science of Artistry: The Fourth String" was published in *Clavier Companion* in Nov/Dec 2013. She lives, writes, plays and thinks in Brownsville, Oregon.

I am fascinated with transformations. I mean all kinds of transformations, from cocoons emerging into butterflies, to plants growing and bearing fruit, to students evolving into sophisticated and articulate musicians. What was once one state becomes over time something new. Franz Liszt introduced the notion of *thematic transformation* as a structural and unifying element in his compositions. The concept of embodying change as a foundation—a given—is brilliant. His music draws us in and carries us along on incredible journeys, all the while transforming musical elements as it transforms us. The most critical moments are those that function as *elisions*, those magical places where endings and beginnings coexist. I think Liszt must have understood life profoundly. The growth and variety that he embedded in his musical compositions can be seen as a metaphor in many ways. Certainly Liszt could see change coming when his daughter, Cosima, already married to Hans von Bulow, had two children by Richard Wagner. She continued to live with Von Bulow and her children, moving the family right next door to Wagner, although it was some time before she divorced the first musician and married the second. That must have been an interesting experience for a father, don't you suppose? Change permeated his life and not just as a concept on staff paper!

In this issue of *Oregon Musician*, the theme of transformation is explored from various aspects, a kaleidoscopic experience when taken as a whole. By looking at a topic from various perspectives we may find something that triggers our imagination, our creativity, our appetite for learning—intellectual fodder, if you will. I have broadened the geographical scope of the journal by including the voices of musicians from beyond Oregon's borders. We no longer live

in a rural outpost on the left coast of America with little connection to the larger world. We are part of the wonderful, diverse matrix every day, and it will benefit us to hear from friends in distant places.

Rhonda Ringering, outgoing editor, has written a passionate and personal view about her current path. I am grateful to Rhonda for passing on this editorship and for her fine work on previous issues. Our *Arts Mentor* columnist, Jill Timmons, has contributed a wise, thoughtful, and inspiring essay. A recent music graduate, Bethany Vianna, provides us her perspective on music in her young life. Annie Risbridger Hind from Bletchingley, Surrey, a British artist and business woman, articulates beautifully what it means to be an adult student of piano. Solveig Holmquist, conductor, discusses what it means to be a conduit between a choral masterpiece, a choir, and an audience. Juliet Bruce, piano teacher in Wokingham, England, adds her views on teaching, inspiration, and gratitude.

Three new columns appear in this issue. *The Poet Speaks* will be devoted to poetry from various writers. Our first poems are by the award-winning Airlie Press poet, Donna Henderson. *The Unseen Artist* is devoted to the inner workings of the piano. Susan Kline, Registered Technician, speaks to us from “inside the piano”. In addition, I am introducing *Baxter’s Bookshelf*, which will have some suggestions for reading that I have found provocative and insightful. My hope is that we can have an ongoing conversation about these topics and these articles. I welcome your questions and observations. I am very pleased to be here with you as the new editor for *Oregon Musician*.

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# Transformation Through Music: A Kaleidoscopic View

## Table of Contents

Editor's Comments by Diane Baxter	page 1
Endings and Beginnings by Rhonda Ringering, NCTM	page 3
Living Music, A Student Retrospective by Bethany Vianna	page 5
A Trail of Clues by Annie Risbridger Hind	page 7
The Blank Slate by Solveig Holmquist	page 9
Teaching the Whole by Juliet Bruce	page 11
<i>Ask Artsmentor</i> by Dr. Jill Timmons, NCTM	page 13
<i>The Poet Speaks:</i> The Beginning of February Between by Donna Henderson	page 15
<i>The Unseen Artist:</i> Transformation by Susan Kline	page 17
<i>Baxter's Bookshelf</i>	page 19

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# Endings and Beginnings

by Rhonda Ringering, NCTM



## About the Author

Rhonda Ringering has released four CDs, is an active solo and collaborative performer for venues throughout the Northwest and frequently appears as an adjudicator and clinician in Oregon and Washington. Her articles have appeared in *American Music Teacher*, *Piano & Keyboard*, *Flute Talk*, *Clavier*, and *Keyboard Companion*. She received her BA from Walla Walla University and her MM from Boston University.

Every creative act is an act of transformation. The artist approaches the easel, the actor approaches the script, and the musician approaches the score with little more than a roadmap to the completion of the project and a willingness to be transformed by the process. As musicians, we encounter a new piece of music, and we painstakingly bring it to life note by note and phrase by phrase. But even the most meticulous of us knows the truth; we cannot offer transformation to our audiences or our students until we are willing to undergo it ourselves.

Transformation is scary. Years ago in a seventh-grade English class I remember a teacher saying that the definition of a short story is “something happens.” Somehow, by the end of the story, the character or characters are changed by what they experience. As classical musicians, many of us pretend that having the score written out for us is somehow safer than improvising or playing by ear. The score is our roadmap, our guarantee that if we follow the rules and study it carefully enough, we will arrive successfully at the gates of high art. More than once in my life, I have used this very structure to keep the scary reality of transformation from disrupting my life. If I played all the notes correctly and phrased everything perfectly, no one could judge or fault me. Of course no one wanted to listen to it either. Over and over again I have had to learn the difficult truth that when I refuse to trust the transformation each piece of music brings me, I deliver a performance (or lesson) that deadens my listener and me.

None of us can freeze time. As beautiful as a moment, relationship, or a performance may be, it slips away and becomes the past. To stay in one interpretation of a piece of music—no matter how lovely it is—changes the piece from a living thing to a dusty relic. To hang on to one way of teaching makes us narrow and lifeless. Refusing to transform locks us into a life of fear, not a life of juicy, messy, (and scary) creativity. Gripping our music and our lives too tightly

## Endings and Beginnings

is like visiting Venice and choosing to obsess over the map rather than experiencing the beauty and grandeur of the city. We might get to where we're going, but we would miss the whole point of the journey.

Transformation is a series of endings and beginnings. Something dies so something else can be born. We are so accustomed to this in music that we rarely see the wonder of it. No matter where we are in a piece of music, we hold the memory of what came before and the expectation of what lies ahead, but the only thing we really have in our hands is the music right under our fingers. We have to let go of the notes that are gone and have faith in the notes that are coming. We have to do both of these things without letting go of the wonder and the beauty of the present moment.

As artists, most of us cannot escape the parallels between creative and music transformation and the never-ending transformative process that makes up every aspect of our lives. In the faces of our parents we see inevitable decay and, perhaps, a glimpse of our own futures. In the faces of our children we see both the infants they were and the adults they are becoming. Loved ones die. Beloved relationships end. Once cherished career stages draw to a close. At the same time, babies are born, new relationships blossom, and opportunities appear. Our task is to gracefully surrender to these changes and allow them to transform us from brittle, fearful, change-adverse people into loving and creative people who meet life with our arms open.

For the past year I have been going through a transformative process that has upended nearly every aspect of my life. I have personal and professional opportunities that can only be described as dreams come true. But with each of these opportunities has come the need to let the old die away. It has been excruciating. It hasn't always been graceful or gracious. What pushes me forward is knowing that the price of not taking these risks will cost me so much more than what I must give up to transform: refusing transformation costs me my soul. The only way to be the artist and the person I am meant to be is to let these transformations happen in their own time and at their own pace, regardless of the outcome.

Among other things, I am letting go of editorship of *The Oregon Musician*. It has been an honor and a privilege to do this job, but it is time for a fresh voice. In addition to her beautiful musicianship, Dr. Diane Baxter brings her fine writing, keen intellect, and sharp wit to the job. Under her guidance, *The Oregon Musician* will transform into a stronger journal that will continue to give us great ideas about music, teaching, and life.

The author Ellen Goodman once wrote so beautifully about change that I saved the quote for nearly two decades: "There's a trick to the 'graceful exit.' It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, or a relationship is over — and let it go. It means leaving what's over without denying its validity or its past importance to our lives. It involves a sense of future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, that we are moving up, rather than out."



# Living Music — A Student Retrospective

by Bethany Vianna



## About the Author

Bethany Vianna works as a collaborative pianist and private piano instructor and is the full-time mama of one small child. She holds her BM and MM in Contemporary Music with an emphasis in Piano Performance from Western Oregon University where she studied privately with Dr. Diane Baxter. Every day is a new adventure for Bethany as she continues to learn how to build up a private studio and motivate her students to create beauty out of even the most basic exercises. Her next adventure includes relocating her family and piano studio to the state of Colorado.

I've been out of school for a year now. Thankfully, however, I've not been far from the piano. As I look forward to the coming year and consider what it might hold, I think back through my years of educational and musical immersion. I consider how those years might continue to shape my approach to music-making and piano teaching.

While perusing the last six years of my piano practice journals, I noticed a consistency in my encounters with music. There is an ever present, underlying question that infused my thoughts on music learning: "How do we get from notes on the page to making music?" Fortunately, though the question persists, there is a gradual unfolding of understanding about the complex nature of music-making, which encourages me to shift my focus from viewing myself as a vessel to be filled with notes to perceiving myself as a creator. While no amount of creativity can compensate for a lack of technique or the inability to read notes and rhythms, creativity must be cultivated alongside technical development. Over time the musician's aural perception can and must be encouraged to transform, to attune itself not just to the perception of accurate rhythm and correct pitch, but to the myriad sound qualities which the instrument is capable of creating. Musicians must learn to immerse themselves into the character of the pieces and become the music they make. Students must be encouraged to live within potentially uncomfortable territory if that's what the music demands. More than that, however, they must create those states of experience with their breath, their intention, and their bodily gestures. They must own the music as their own creation, for, in the moment of music-making, they are no longer merely interpreting what another has set before them. They *become* the creators of sound and character.

I remember clearly a moment while working on the first of Samuel Barber's *Excursions for Piano* in which I

## Living Music — A Student Retrospective

thought I could not possibly play that piece with enough drive and edginess to convince my audience that all of the dissonances built into the piece were intentional. The fear of becoming the edgy wild individual that the music embodied held me back from immersing my intentions fully into that character. Fortunately, I was offered some wise advice. My instructor suggested to me that “one need not live in that edgy world permanently, but only stay there for the duration of the piece.” My instructor was right. As creators we can immerse ourselves in a myriad of characters for a short time and the act of becoming, rather than limiting us permanently to a particular character, allows us to experience a host of worlds that are only as far away as our finger tips. Often times the fear of capturing the wrong character or becoming an unflattering character, halts young musicians from exploring. The fear of getting it wrong stifles the desire to experience new terrain. Or, perhaps, it is simply the fear that they might become so engaged with the character of the music that they become less precise with the notes and rhythms they have worked so diligently to master.

In the early stages of music education a huge push is made to get students reading music. A great deal of time is spent, and rightly so, encouraging students to read the notes on the page and count, count, count. The notes and rhythms are important; they, along with the dynamics and articulations, give the musician a starting point, but it is as though these elements were all sitting on the counter in their own separate containers with a recipe card next to them and no chef to actually combine the ingredients until the musician assumes the role of creator and believes that she is more than just a holding vessel.

In a journal entry from the final weeks of my Master’s Degree I wrote: “There is so much world [in music] beyond the practice of notes and rhythms and even dynamics. We have to be explorers, eager for new experiences.” The piano can often be an intimidating vehicle to drive and it is easy to get caught up in being good students: approaching the material as if we were preparing for an exam. But, as a creator, it is our responsibility to both realize accurate notes and rhythms and to create an identity for the music which we must then inhabit. Increasingly, as we become familiar with the realization of notes and rhythms, this creation occurs through the type of touch that we use and the postures we allow our body to assume. It happens when we rely on our eyes to read the information from the score and our ears to listen to those notes. We must constantly ask if the sound we are creating is the one which we intend.

As I embark on another year of music-making, my goal is to keep my ears open. I am an explorer, eager for new experiences.





# A Trail of Clues

by Annie Risbridger Hind



*Annie Risbridger Hind is Owner and Managing Director of Risbridger Ltd., an engineering firm in Redhill, Surrey, England. Annie is a talented jewellery designer, gardener, chef, painter and kayak rower. She studies piano and sings in a chamber choir near her home south of London. She graciously responded to several questions about life as an adult piano student.*

## About the Author

Interest in sciences and arts at school led Annie to study Jewellery Design and Manufacture. After fifteen years designing and making fine jewellery, Annie joined the family engineering company, taking over as Managing Director ten years ago. From botanical illustration to rally car driving to building/interior design, Annie and her husband Andrew are most proud of the renovation of their Scottish house 'Tigh na Breac', on the shore of Loch Etive. From a 1907 ruin, it was preserved and transformed into a 21st century home.

Over the years I have built up knowledge, experience, confidence and a personal style in my painting and designing. Piano playing is far more difficult for me. Performing music is transient and fleeting, although the preparation stage is immense. Live music performances are ephemeral, immediately gone, hopefully remembered, but never to be exactly replicated. In that way it is a very different form of expression. My enjoyment of piano study is a leisure time luxury, both in terms of the time I take for it and with the intrinsic cost of the instrument and the lessons/coaching.

When deciding what to study, I follow a trail of clues life puts in front of me. Music, literature, and people I come across may give me something to follow in my journey. I recently asked a highly skilled jewellery maker (previously a concert pianist) what he had on his music desk. 'Alkan's works' was his answer, so I started finding out about these pieces. I am now working on a small piece, reading about Alkan's life, and listening to his larger works. Discussions with my teacher about these discoveries bring about interesting serendipities. One of her acquaintances compiled/edited a book of Alkan miniatures. She found it in her music library and it contained the piece I am working on! I find all these coincidences and discoveries fascinating and extremely motivating.

Music has the power to transform my mood. Learning through music comes with a built-in framework of discipline and motivation. My brain is constantly working



## A Trail of Clues

on things subconsciously, which is good for me physiologically and psychologically. It provides what I term “soul food”—something just for myself. My arthritis is improved by playing, keeping my joints suppler and counteracting the ‘mousefingeritis’ that working at a computer all day gives me. At work I carry many complex responsibilities and am very much in charge; at the piano I enjoy the freedom of a child who is taking her first steps! Each piece I learn helps me, as each new set of demands adds something to my skills. Right now I’m exploring *Frühlingslied* by Halvdan Kjerulf. It requires a wide range of dynamics, touch types and musical intentions. The characters range from lyrical, arpeggiated sections to staccato passages, with sforzandi, chromaticism and octave work. All of these aspects will help my technique grow.

The most gratifying and exciting performance I have had so far was playing Ravel’s *Prelude (1913)* in a concert in France in 2013. Although it was terrifying and challenging, it gave me a huge sense of achievement and exhilaration. The same emotions and physical problems were experienced by all the performers and I found great confidence and comfort in knowing that. This experience affected me profoundly. The memories and emotions that I experienced whilst learning it and ultimately playing such a beautiful piece for an extremely knowledgeable audience have stayed with me. The comments and responses I received were truly amazing, empowering and encouraging. I love the beautiful John Field nocturne that I have been working on for years (literally), and Cecile Chaminade’s *Elegie*, another firm favourite. I often wish my dear Mum could have heard me play it.

Music is reliant on the listener, much as paintings are open to interpretation by the viewer. Much can be felt, imagined and ‘seen’ internally when listening to music, enabling a connection to and a personal relationship with the work. Recently my husband enjoyed our choir’s performance of Russian Liturgical music, finding it extremely beautiful. Perhaps had he understood the Russian text he would not have had the freedom to enjoy the music as fully as he did. Some people may rely on words to ‘explain’ music, but as a ‘visual person’ I prefer to imagine, the music’s story. It is most evocative to refer to other senses and emotions when illustrating pianistic ideas.

For a number of years I was motivated by achieving grades, (*Ed. note:* this refers to a British system similar to OMTA Syllabus) but now I don’t think that having one person on one day say that I can play really matters. I want to learn to play for others. Doing anything in total isolation is not helpful for growth nor is it rewarding. Encouragement from people I love and respect is very motivational for me, and playing in front of others is an enhanced, generous form of communication. I can lose my problems when I play and be totally myself. Playing piano is a deeply therapeutic and absorbing activity.



# The Blank Slate

by Dr. Solveig Holmquist



*The following came from a conversation with Solveig Holmquist, keyboardist, educator and conductor. Solveig is very well known for her beautiful and captivating performances of works for large choir. Many may not know that she is also a fine keyboardist and began her undergraduate studies as an organist. She shares her thoughts about music and transformation with you here.*

**To transform:** *to thoroughly change in nature, disposition, heart; make better*

## About the Author

Dr. Solveig Holmquist is the founder and artistic director of Festival Choral Oregon, a civic choir in its 35th season. FCO performs major choral/orchestral works for American and European audiences. Recently retired as Western Oregon University's Director of Choral Studies, Holmquist is in demand at numerous clinics and festivals. Under Director Helmuth Rilling, Solveig sang with the Grammy-Award winning Oregon Bach Festival from 1985–2013. Dr. Holmquist holds an MM in Music Education (Western Oregon University) and a DMA in Music Education and Choral Conducting (University of Oregon).

I spent many years as an accompanist before giving more of my life to conducting. During those years I learned what an accompanist needs in order to be successful and to bring music to life: frequent eye contact, meaningful preparation, a clear beat, and a collaborative spirit. My joyful years as a church organist helped me to understand that every hymn has its own perfect tempo, and that every hymn must breathe, both within and between the stanzas. The same is true of music one conducts.

The Icelandic author Halldór Laxness wrote: "I have not lived a single day without being convinced of the superiority of music to literature in the conveying the spiritual world to our material lives." Certainly the deepest spiritual insights I have experienced have been through music. Some of that music has been purely instrumental, but I believe my particular gift is to help performers see and interpret text which is masterfully set to music. Laxness's favorite composer (and mine) is Bach, the consummate theologian. Entire volumes have been written exploring the richness of symbolism and meaning in the *St. Matthew Passion* alone. But it's crucial to be a student of Baroque performance practice in order to bring the meanings to life in a way that touches the soul. All too often I've heard performances of Bach's works that were painfully heavy and slow, or too fast for the sake of virtuosity

## The Blank Slate

and therefore flippant and missing the message: either way, the listener is rarely moved. The phrasing and articulations are crucial, as well. They are so much fun to discover and master, making the music suddenly easy, when it “breathes” in the right places. Those phrases are tragically wasted when left undiscovered. That musical lesson seems to be the very essence of what we are to discover about life in God: it’s easy when it breathes.

I agree, too, with Leah McLaren that singing makes us better people. She wrote that “singing in a choir is a transcendent experience—and there aren’t many of those in life. It instills gratitude and bliss without the contortions of yoga or hangovers of alcohol. Singing doesn’t just make us feel better—it makes us better people. By singing in a group, we choose to recede for a moment from selfish concerns and pursue harmony with those around us” (The Globe and Mail, March 14, 2014). One of my most memorable experience as a choral singer was performing Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* at the Oregon Bach Festival. Interspersed with choral singers from Germany and Japan, in commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of D-Day, it was a cosmic experience in many ways, as we all grieved for those we had lost.

I have been privileged to conduct many, many wonderful masterworks. The performances are all memorable in some way, but one that stands out is a performance of the Bach *Magnificat* in Carnegie Hall. I have been the guest conductor for a New York production company there a number of times, but that was the only time I programmed Bach. New York orchestras of a certain level tend to want to play everything like Rachmaninov, and my rehearsals with this group were pretty grueling. At first they wouldn’t look up, and refused to play lightly and at my tempo. Two of the choirs involved were mine; they knew what to do and so influenced the other singers. Finally, at the dress rehearsal, the players were on board, and the performance absolutely danced! The principal bassoonist found me afterward and said “My dear, the composer was present tonight.” I was so honored to hear that.

Music has transformed my life in profound ways. Without my being conscious of it until recently, throughout my life, music has been what’s written on the blank slate that I was when I entered the world. Without it I would have been something different, though I can’t imagine what that could be. Almost any music, masterfully performed, can be transforming. Insight always comes from many unexpected sources, but I challenge anyone to listen to great renditions of the Bach *B Minor Mass* without being changed for the better. The more you study and perform it, the more you grow. Within that massive work the most astonishing section is the end of the *Confiteor*: its promising text literally leads us into the *Sanctus* where we are unmistakably in the presence of God.



# Teaching the Whole

by Juliet Bruce



*Juliet Bruce, pianist, teaches a large private cadre of students at her home studio in Wokingham, Berkshire, England about 35 miles west of London. Here she discusses teaching children and adults.*

## About the Author

Juliet Bruce has been performing for as long as she can remember with her cellist sister in the Bruce Duo. They have performed in many London venues, including Wigmore Hall. The Bruce Duo was chosen as teenage soloists on two occasions with Reading Youth Orchestra. Juliet plays in many chamber ensembles and particularly loves lieder recitals. She is chairperson of the Piano Section of the Woodley Festival of Music & Arts. Juliet is very committed to her large teaching practice in Wokingham west of London.

The most rewarding aspect of my teaching comes in helping pupils of all ages and standards gain sufficient skills on the piano to enjoy playing and gain a real sense of achievement at every level. Most of my students are school age children, largely from backgrounds where activities involving learning are seen as the most important extra-curricular skills to achieve. Emphasis on taking music exams is strong. My adult students are usually returning to the piano after years of not studying and are content to play more for their own enjoyment, although the exam system does provide a bench mark for them as well.

It is easy to follow a methodical and structured approach with children but I think it is very important to remember that each child is an individual and each has a very different way of learning and absorbing information. Each acquires skills at a different pace and it is crucial to be as positive as possible and offer encouragement all the time, however seemingly small the improvement. It seems to me that young children are finding it more difficult to learn to read music in comparison with a few years ago and their general concentration is not as good either. Older children definitely suffer from extra pressure with school work affect-

# Teaching the Whole

ing the time they have to practice. These aspects of their lives must be taken into consideration. The same is true of adults but they have a more realistic sense of their own ability and are more likely to set their own goals.

It is very important to choose books and pieces that suit the individual student, from beginning levels right through to the exam pieces. In particular, when entering a festival or performing in a concert it is essential that they play something they really enjoy and can identify with in order to do themselves justice on the platform. At this point I draw on works I have studied, performed and enjoyed, in the hope that these pieces will stimulate similar feelings in my students. It is certainly very exciting to watch them tackle the more advanced repertoire with increasing confidence and realise their potential in pursuing their piano playing more seriously. The transition to advanced repertoire may be the single most defining moment in their education and ultimately their career path: having thought music/piano playing was an important part of their lives, they may realise how much dedication is needed. Some may not feel committed enough. Others come to the conclusion that playing an instrument is an integral part of their life which they cannot ignore and they wish to pursue it in greater depth. At that point I advise them to follow as wide a course as possible before ultimately deciding which direction to go, unless they are exceptionally gifted in which case they move directly towards more specialised training.

Studying music helps young people develop their personalities and confidence levels and leads them to recognise that they have a skill which is admired by others. One very important element is gaining the confidence to teach young people themselves and discover the pleasure it gives, in both directions. Many of my most talented students over the years have come to teaching at some point in their careers and felt very fulfilled by it, often to their surprise. After teaching for 45 years my own sense of fulfilment is as strong, probably stronger, than it was when I started, for no other reason than people continue to aspire to learn the piano at all ages and continue to seek guidance.



# 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!

For the July issue of *Oregon Musician*, I have suspended the question and answer format and instead, have opted for a bit more narrative regarding the topic of transformation. As we say good-bye to the outgoing editor, Rhonda Ringering, and welcome the new editor for OM, Dr. Diane Baxter, it's a timely topic to explore.

Transformation? It's a little like trying to define happiness. I know what it is but it's difficult to put it into concrete terms, at least crafting a definition with which everyone will concur. Still, I think there are overarching themes that characterize a transformative experience and certainly our profession, in an ideal sense, brings this possibility to both our audiences and our students. We have all witnessed those rarified performances that stay with us for a lifetime. I remember one of Gina Bachauer's last performances. It was in Seattle, I recall the program like it was yesterday, and I even remember what she was wearing—a black taffeta gown. When she took her final bow I said to myself, "I want to play like *that!*" In witnessing her cutting-edge concert, I heard something extraordinary and was inspired to change. In short, I was transformed through a performance by a luminary artist. That ground breaking experience was a surprise—a kind of serendipity. I knew the Bachauer concert would be marvelous but I had no idea what it was to bring.

Sometimes, on the other hand, we seek those transformative experiences on purpose. It can be anything from a retreat, a workshop, a mentor teacher, new repertoire that requires us to stretch, teaching in new ways, or an innovative initiative in continuing education. Sometimes it can actually be the inverse of activity. I



choose to do /ess because I need to create a space for transformation. In our 24/7 culture, this is both valuable and rare.

So we can experience transformation in serendipitous ways, or we can make room for it. We can seek it out. It is part of the musician's journey. It is not simply a process of reorganizing ourselves, but rather at the core, changing the way we are, the way we perceive, and discovering new values and ideals that we hold to be true. It's big, and sometimes it requires returning to our own personal salt mines. And yet without those benchmarks of transformation, life can become stale. Have you ever gotten to a point where at the end of the teaching year you are driven to discover new ideas for the following year: compelling repertoire, fresh concepts, innovative teaching materials, perhaps putting your finger in the outlet? That's a call to transformation.

As teachers, we have a sacred opportunity to bring the transformative experience to our students. I am arguing for this as something we do "on purpose" every day! We know this on an intuitive level. If I am teaching the music of great composers, how can I not be transformed by their music? That's what we convey to our students. Many years ago when I was studying a work by Liszt with my beloved teacher Gyorgy Sebok, he pointed to the various alterations that Liszt made in the primary theme of *Vallée d'Obermann*. When we came to the exquisite E major section, he said, "This is a prayer." His observation wasn't driven by a particular religious perspective but instead, he was pointing me in the direction of what Liszt had in mind—a transformative work.

Long after the fire of transformation has consumed its fuel and we find ourselves in new territory we can look to several markers that define and validate that experience. For me they include two leitmotifs: humility and gratitude. Those awe-inspiring experiences of change give me a glimpse into the vastness of the creative process. It is much larger than my day-to-day concerns. It fills me with gratitude for being alive, being an artist, serving my students, and in my small corner of the world, bringing something of beauty to others.

As we head into the warmth of an Oregon summer, join me in embracing those transformational opportunities. It may be that our best mode is to seek random acts of transformation.



# The Poet Speaks

by Donna Henderson



## About the Author

Donna Henderson is the author of three collections of poems, including most recently *The Eddy Fence*, which was a finalist for the 2011 Oregon Book Award in poetry. Her poems, essays, reviews and song lyrics have appeared in a variety of magazines, anthologies, performance venues and recordings. She is a founding member and editor of Airlie Press.

A licensed clinical social worker, Donna maintains a psychotherapy practice in Monmouth, Oregon and teaches both creative writing and counseling at area colleges. She lives with her husband, Rich Sutliff, on the Deschutes River, in Maupin.

## The Beginning of February

Now spring in its flannels  
starts its delicate tremble.

Here a treeful of catkins.  
There a cherry's risked

bursting its snug buds to bloom.  
*This everything?* You'd asked

on this day, half my life ago  
now, toward my pile of things

poised by the door like caddis flies  
in an eddy fence, caught between the river's

pool & swirl—the life I'd planned  
and the one I hadn't planned.

No longer separate, my things  
not yet joined—

and my yes was a kind of dying—  
the way cells, consenting to split

surrender to mystery the soul's  
containment.

Outside snow held its ground.  
Starry dark hovered over.

And more or less with you I stepped  
through the door into it—

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# The Poet Speaks

by Donna Henderson

## Between

It was a good garden, but I wanted it  
moved from its plot uphill to the pond's edge

so I could work by the water—green glaze  
shimmering away toward some distant willows—

and near the house a marsh  
bridged the shift from dry to wet, erasing

seams, the ground going softer, then spongy, then  
sunken but still visible through a crest of reeds

where cattle shambled hip-deep and ducks  
churned; all the swimming and flying and walking things

met, it seemed to me, in that marsh,  
grazing and gulping.

And I wanted to transplant my garden into that turgid soil  
against all sense; to bury rootlets of kale, leeks,  
squash among the muscular grasses, the wild seeds—

So I stood awhile like that, passing my hands  
through the shallows, imagining the joy of whole days

kneeling between those solid and fluid worlds; all day  
dipping and lifting.

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# The Unseen Artist

## Transformation

by Susan Kline



### About the Author

Susan Kline, a piano technician living near Corvallis, studied at Oberlin and at UT/Austin. She has a Masters degree in applied cello. She played in the Hamilton Philharmonic (Ontario), then did two sabbatical replacement jobs on the Canadian prairies. In 1978, she attended George Brown College's Piano Technology course in Toronto. After 12 years of sweaty piano work in Stockton, California, she happily moved to Philomath, Oregon. She tunes for most concerts and festivals in the area. She has written a series of articles for *Piano Technicians Journal*.

Searching for transformation becomes comical, because it's wherever you look! And yet, transformation involves deep magic. A handful of dried seeds become lush plants four feet tall, making delicious snow peas. Gardeners try to provide good conditions, but what happens after seeds are planted—one stands back in awe.

Likewise, when all goes well, a beginning music student is slowly transformed. For piano students, my work is to remove the obstacle of a bad-sounding and/or malfunctioning instrument. I may make a few encouraging observations, as one never knows when something will matter. Years of lessons and hours of practice change students, each one differently. For some, the transformation goes far beyond the ability to play an instrument. As time passes, mistaken beliefs gradually dissolve, which leaves room for the growth of new ideas. New worlds open up. They achieve comfort with their own work habits, so they don't have to scold themselves to work on tasks. They become confident and able to play for others, or to speak in front of others. They gradually learn to organize their lives in benign ways, and some have a lifetime of benefit from their study.

I believe that the best transformations happen when we make the conditions right, and then have the humility to get out of the way.

For me, the most important question is, after years of lessons, do they love to play? Some may have taken a messy path, all over the place for awhile, and perhaps no one could

say they were “gifted”, but do they like the result? I once met someone in a ceramics class who told me that many years before he had been the very last one in the class to master centering the clay on the potter’s wheel. “But,” he said, “I’m the only one from the class who is still throwing pots.”

My own journey combined fast and slow learning. Well taught, I picked up piano technology like I was born to it, but then I struggled for years out in the field. I was gradually transformed into a concert piano technician and I ADORE being one. I get to work with such wonderful people! They take little black dots on a piece of paper and turn them into such beautiful sounds that people may weep or laugh with joy. Now, there’s a transformation! Everyday work also has its own satisfactions.

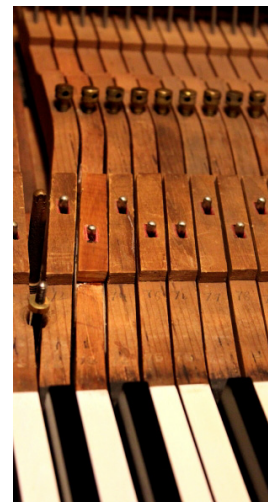
Knowledge I consider helpful for anyone teaching music:

- how a piano works
- what parts are called
- what is easy, hard, or impossible to fix
- and how to describe what you want.

It’s true that some of you teach other instruments, or teach voice. It’s also true that many excellent pianists don’t know much about what’s “under the hood.” Still, anyone whose students get beyond an elementary level will be dealing with accompanists and therefore with pianos at some point. If a piano is a bad actor, basic knowledge is a lot better than imagination.

For instance, a few years ago My Customer’s grand had two notes seizing up. She thought it was because a previous technician had adjusted the capstans (those brass things at the back ends of the keys which push up). The previous technician had turned them just a little so that the hammers at rest made a nice, neat line. She was sure he had ruined those two notes. I explained over and over again that the sluggish notes were a common problem with this brand, because the center pins (they’re like little hinges) were nickel-plated, and this plating can flake off and increase friction. She saw me take them apart, ream the woolen bushings, put in new center pins, and *shazam!* the notes were fixed! Having a grasp of the basics ahead of time would have spared her months of suspicion and resentment.

I hope to provide these basics in a few articles, which one might call “Piano Anatomy 101.” I happily answer questions, except about pricing, which is between a piano owner and the person doing the work.



## Baxter's Bookshelf

These books are thought-provoking  
and well-written, deserving of our attention:

Friedrich, Otto. *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. This book is thorough and kindly written. Otto Friedrich loved Glenn Gould and studied many, many documents to write about the artist.

Rosen, Charles. *Piano Notes: The World of the Pianist*. New York: Free Press, 2002. Rosen's view on pianism are sometimes quirky, perhaps even irritating, but always interesting. This book feels as though one is having a conversation with Mr. Rosen.

Timmons, Jill. *The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Career Vision and Plan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Timmons has written a wonderful primer for the 21st century musician. This generous and helpful book provides guidance from many angles and is a must read!

In addition, I would suggest the following hour-length video on Luciano Pavarotti. It is wonderful: *A Life in Seven Arias*.

