The Performance Conversation: A Pragmatic, Curricular Approach to Speaking from the Stage

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THE PERFORMANCE CONVERSATION:
A PRAGMATIC, CURRICULAR APPROACH TO SPEAKING FROM THE STAGE

By

BARRETT HIPES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

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Barrett Hipes

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music 
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of 
Doctor of Musical Arts

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Abstract

THE PERFORMANCE CONVERSATION
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Advisor: Stephen Blum

The future of music depends not only upon the musician and his/her pursuit of technical and musical excellence, but also on the performer’s ability to effectively communicate musical ideas with the audience verbally, helping them to connect to the music beyond just a general or analytical level in pursuit of true appreciation. The ability to express multiple layers of the performer’s approach to repertoire, providing each audience with an informed vehicle for their own understanding and examination, is a supremely useful tool for advancing support for music. The intent of this document is to make a compelling argument to justify the need for a new curriculum to prepare the performer as communicator, educator, and aesthetic interpreter of music, identifying and elaborating upon four overarching areas of observation important to analysis, public speaking, and personal understanding: foundational, historical/theoretic, narrative, and profound. Aligning with what appears to be a standard approach to “music appreciation” for the general public, performers themselves often overlook the aesthetic, emotional, familiar, and profound concepts inherent within the music, focusing primarily on general aspects or concrete harmonic or metric constructs. This document will also focus partially on the history and controversy of the development of “music appreciation” imparted from musical artists to the general public (starting around 1930, and building upon efforts of
earlier music critics), citing opinions and assertions from prominent performers, educators, and philosophers about the critical and often ignored components that generate musical understanding and appreciation within the listener.

The fundamental motivation for this project is my work with students in a conservatory setting, as Director of the Alan D. Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship at The Juilliard School, along with concurrent observations while teaching music and art appreciation at St. John’s University, where I am an adjunct Associate Professor (teaching courses entitled The Creative Process, and Creativity and the Arts). I see the most prevalent focus of conservatory students as practice. While they work to hone their technical skills for the concert stage, little attention seems to be given to their ability to also present music to an audience through public speaking and other forms of interaction and engagement. This sometimes can result in non-musicians being stifled by a lack of understanding of the music being performed; contemporary music in particular. I feel that much of this lack of understanding can be corrected through effective communication on behalf of the musician, and a well-executed presentation of some or all of the above-listed areas of observation.
This dissertation is dedicated to all of my past, present, and future students.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the result of a number of years of working closely with students to hone their skills as effective communicators, and observing the positive effects that exercises and preparation in this area can have on the individual, the audience, and the overall impact of a performance. I am incredibly fortunate to work closely with faculty and colleagues who share a profound interest in the topic, have offered suggestions and support, and continued to “check in” while I concurrently worked on this project along with numerous other assignments as a teacher and administrator. The students I interact with on a daily basis are incredible. They are the true reason I have put so much time and energy into this document. I’m hopeful that it will ultimately serve as a resource for them as they advance as performers and advocates for the arts.

My dissertation advisor, Stephen Blum, has been enormously supportive and helpful throughout the process of shaping my initial ideas into something cohesive. His suggestions, meticulous attention to detail, and supportive feedback have been absolutely terrific. I’m also very grateful to my DMA advisor, Norman Carey, who has always been there to answer questions, provide encouragement, and guide me through this degree program. Jacqueline Martelle is the icing on the cake! She has always had my back, and has been tremendously supportive to me and all of my peers in the program. I’m also so thankful to the “new guy,” Geoff Burleson, who agreed to chair my committee before we even had the chance to fully get to know each other! His insight and excellent suggestions allowed me to think and rethink sections that ultimately benefitted from more depth and greater clarity.

It has also been an honor to study with Morris Lang. He has been a superb mentor and is really the I Ching of percussion as far as I’m concerned! I’m so fortunate to have connected with him when I did, and am so glad to have him as a friend and supporter moving forward. My
previous instructors including, but not limited to, Chalon Ragsdale, Stanley Morris, W. Dale Warren, Bob Becker, She-e Wu, and Chris Deviney have really made me the musician and educator that I am and strive to be each day. Mr. Ragsdale is my first call when I need advice, my Zen master, and has never stopped teaching me.

And of course, huge thanks go to Mom, Dad, Crosby, Molly, Lucy, Katie, Aaron, Adriane, Eddie, my whole family, Anthony’s whole family, coffee, Lake Norfork, and Anthony.
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The Performance Conversation:
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INTRODUCTION

To a classroom or studio teacher, spending time helping students develop their speaking skills can often be a secondary or sometimes inconsequential consideration. Based on the exceptional instruction that most students receive, and long-term contribution to their artistry, it is abundantly clear that performance faculty are adept at communicating their craft to the next generation of practitioners. We know that a goal for studio faculty is to provide tools for each student to hone his/her technical and expressive abilities, but lending attention to their public speaking abilities is not always considered an important contributing factor to the end result of a performance. Some performance faculty may even be entirely adverse to the idea of their students speaking from the stage during a recital or other performance.

My contention is that public speaking is an essential tool for performers, which can greatly enhance their ability to communicate their artistic intent. It can also help them to develop a clearer understanding of the how and why behind their interpretation. Enhanced communication skills can even further advance their career prospects. With this document, I intend to provide a pragmatic approach that performers can use to hone their abilities as public speakers, emphasize public speaking as an essential element of performance training, and prove that speaking from the stage has a direct impact on listener appreciation as well as the performer’s interpretation of works being performed. I will discuss the relevant components of a good speech, and provide case studies and exercises that I often use in my own teaching. I will also provide some historical context for speaking from the stage and its direct impact on music appreciation, supporting
interviews from prominent performers and arts educators, and conclusions drawn from these ideas.

I refer to the collective communication that the artist engages in both internally and externally as *The Performance Conversation*. This requires a type of practice and preparation that is more grounded in exploration and introspection, and less immersed in technique. This conversation again requires the performer to consider not just *how* to make music, but also the reasons *why*.

Looking back on just some of the “celebrities” of effective audience communication (e.g., Leonard Bernstein, Arturo Toscanini, Walter Damrosch), we see that this skill can significantly impact the intrinsic listener experience, has historically led to the canonization of certain works, styles, and composers; and can build upon the foundation of “music appreciation” as we know it. Therefore, I intend to show that public speaking has numerous broad implications on the future of music in society. Performers who connect more effectively with their audiences bring a clearer sense of understanding, humanity, and personal connection between the listener and the music.

My work with graduate and undergraduate performers on this topic has cemented my belief that *some* teachers do not require or encourage students to consider or internalize all of the reasons why they are doing what they are doing, or playing what they are playing. As a performer myself, I have found it important to be able to answer questions that may enhance personal meaning, inform my performance practice, and positively influence the listener experience. I feel it is difficult, outside of spontaneous interpretation or improvisation (as in jazz), to perform a work with emotion, inflection, and sensitivity if the performer is so mentally detached that they cannot articulate *why* or *if* they even care about the piece being played.
Performers may not even think in detail about the nuts and bolts of a piece of music; something as basic as how the sound is being created. They know how to do it, so they just do it with little reflection. Performance becomes automatic and entrainment supersedes the actual exploration of their choices, emotions, vulnerability, and transparency.

The schema that I have used to initiate this conversation when coaching performers consists of four distinct levels of observation, and requires that the performers consider as many aspects of each level as they can. Within each level of observation, they can then create a hierarchy of items that they find important to their interpretation, and a separate hierarchy of items they find most important to potentially communicate to an audience. From those select items that rise to the top of each level of observation, I then ask that they consider how these items could help to enhance or potentially inhibit the listener experience if expressed verbally to an audience.

The primary levels of observation along with accompanying sample considerations are included and referenced throughout this dissertation. The levels themselves should not be considered one more important than the other, as the hierarchy of performer concerns with each piece of music will vary. A performer’s approach to learning a piece and developing a unique interpretation is based on their individual education, personality, and technique among other factors. Therefore, certain levels of observation may seem more idiomatic than others.

1. Curricular Overview for The Performance Conversation

The purpose of this document is to provide a reasoned and structured approach to thinking about music. As previously mentioned, four levels of observation will be established and explored, and sample questions for performer evaluation of each level as they apply to a
particular piece of music will be provided. From a curricular perspective, in a studio setting or through independent study, I suggest that students become comfortable with each level of observation and begin to reexamine a variety of works in their repertoire of differing genres, sensibilities, and styles. With faculty support, students can develop an even clearer understanding of the building blocks of an effective performance and presentation, as well as the listening objectives and responses they should anticipate or try to inspire in an outside observer.

These levels of observation will be accompanied by supporting research along with insights and interviews from educational practitioners, as well as historical context. While this document will argue the importance of audience communication, the performer must also be prepared to justify the need for effective communication in performance and in preparation. Equal weight will be placed on the significance of internal communication and its impact on interpretation and performance practice, along with external communication and its impact on the listener experience.

2. Peer Curricula and Other Activities

As an active member of the Network of Music Career Development Officers, I am very much aware of the activities and offerings of career development offices at college and conservatory music programs throughout the United States. Much like Juilliard, several peer institutions offer co-curricular programs and seminars to support their students in content areas that may not be covered through their required coursework. Juilliard, for example, provides a series of weekly lunchtime programs that cover a wide variety of career-related topics, including public speaking. The New England Conservatory, Manhattan School of Music, Yale School of Music, Curtis Institute, Peabody Conservatory, and Eastman School of Music also provide a regular program series and most of them include at least one session that specifically addresses
public speaking. The activities are similar in format, in that they are usually guided by a faculty member or guest presenter, often in an interactive lecture format, and usually lasting between one and two hours.

Some schools also provide courses that specifically address public speaking. The Curtis Institute has a faculty member who specializes in “Presentation and Oral Practice,”¹ and teaches regular elective courses on Public Speaking. The Eastman School of Music, as part of their “Entrepreneurial Thinking” track toward a certificate in Arts Leadership, offers a regular half-semester elective called “Speak for Yourself: Public Speaking for Musicians.”² Other prestigious schools of music that have the benefit of being tethered to larger university departments (such as the University of Michigan) also share an institutional catalog with departments of Communications, Business, or other diverse areas that offer students core or general electives in public speaking. However, actual credit-bearing courses at conservatories of music specifically geared toward public speaking are few in number.

Juilliard does not have a course that addresses only this topic. However, the school provides students with unlimited access to the Writing and Communications Center³, the Alan D. Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship⁴, and regular faculty-driven programs.

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¹ https://www.curtis.edu/faculty/faculty-bios-by-name/jeffrey-stingerstein.html
³ The Writing and Communications Center at Juilliard provides free support for writing and speaking, as well as tutoring to all students through one-on-one and small group appointments. The Center also provides educational programs to support the students’ needs. It is also of particular benefit to Juilliard’s large population of international students, many of whom are not native English speakers.
⁴ The mission statement that I drafted for the Marks Center, a student services office/division, for its launch in January of 2015 states, “The Alan D. Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship at Juilliard provides a comprehensive integration of career services programs and entrepreneurial strategies into the ecosystem of the Juilliard community, preparing graduates across all disciplines to be confident professionals at the intersection of creativity, technology, and business. Critical required coursework for entering students, extensive co-curricular programming, professional networking and consultations, and post-graduate grant resources are provided through the Center, as well as advanced elective coursework which has been created and will be continually revised and updated to match the ever-changing landscape. The office also provides the essential services needed to assist students in developing long-term career plans. These services include: career guidance; self-assessment tools;
and workshops. The school also strongly promotes “writing and speaking” as essential elements of the curriculum, to the point of requiring that all faculty members incorporate these concepts into every class that they teach.

All of Juilliard’s peers listed above have administrators and staff who offer support for public speaking as a resource, including (but not at all limited to) Yale School of Music’s Office of Career Strategies⁵, The New England Conservatory’s Entrepreneurial Musicianship⁶, Manhattan School of Music’s Center for Music Entrepreneurship⁷, and Curtis Institute’s Community Engagement and Career Development Office⁸.

I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

1. The Deterioration of Music Appreciation

In Theodor Adorno’s article, “A Social Critique of Radio Music,”⁹ he describes the deterioration of music appreciation as having a direct correlation with the rise in radio listenership and the commercialization of serious music. The system empowers listeners, making them feel as though they are receiving a special treat, while the reality is that of an imposed product and consumer relationship. The system imposes upon the listener a shallow analysis of “good and bad,” without heightening the listener experience. He introduces the concept of résumé, curriculum vitae, and website development; career workshops; marketing; graphic image design; project development; fundraising; internship opportunities; and performance opportunities.”

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⁵ http://music.yale.edu/study/career-strategies/
⁶ http://necmusic.edu/em
⁷ http://www msmnyc.edu/instruction-faculty/center-for-music-entrepreneurship
⁸ https://www.curtis.edu/students/learning-performing/curtis-community-engagement-program/
“commodity listening,” in which shallow observations are made through a hollow listening experience.

Today music is considered ethereal and sublime, although it actually functions as a commodity. Today the terms ethereal and sublime have become trademarks. Music has become a means instead of an end, a fetish. That is to say, music has ceased to be a human force and is consumed like other consumer goods. This produces “commodity listening,” a listening whose ideal it is to dispense as far as possible with any effort on the part of the recipient—even if such an effort on the part of the recipient is the necessary condition of grasping the sense of the music. It is the ideal of Aunt Jamima ready-mix for pancakes extended to the field of music. The listener suspends all intellectual activity when dealing with music and is content with consuming and evaluating its gustatory qualities—just as if the music which tasted best were also the best music possible. (p. 231)

There is great potential for the uninformed listener to merely scratch the surface of intellectual understanding through the entrained experience that comes from generations of commercialization and glorification of “good” music above all else. Adorno refers to increasing standardization as being a component of the “commodity character of music,” and not only the standardization of musical programming on the radio, but also the standardization of musical interpretation. Through radio, society began to experience a “retrogression of listening.”

There exists today a tendency to listen to Beethoven’s Fifth as if it were a set of quotations from Beethoven’s Fifth. We have developed a larger framework of concepts such as atomistic listening and quotation listening, which lead us to the hypothesis that something like a musical children’s language is taking shape…
In the Wagnerian period, the elite listener was eager to follow the most daring musical exploits. Today the corresponding group is the firmest bulwark against musical progress and feels happy only if it is fed Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony again and again. (p. 233)

To Adorno, music was on a path to becoming mindless entertainment, rather than an experience. Questions should arise for present-day performers about the mission of their creative process and goal of the stage performance. Are we, as performers, attempting to elicit an appreciation? Are we working to challenge the listener, or do we fall victim to standardization in order to provide a performance/commodity that the audience can accept without thinking?

2. The Impact of Performance Programming and Presentation

What does all of this mean to those who are active performers? I believe that one important entry point is the process of programming a concert, which should coincide with the performance conversation. All too often works are selected without a real consideration for reason, relevance, or narrative. Part of that is cookie-cutter entrainment on the part of educators and private instructors, as well as the endless circuits of instrumental competitions: a piece from the Baroque, one from the Classical, one Romantic, and a rousing crowd-pleaser, without regard for the program’s flow, a cohesive thematic through-line, or a personal justification for the works being performed at all.

I would argue that a repetitive selection of standards for the concert program contributes to the (already firmly established) canonization of concert repertoire, limiting innovation and shifting the focus to perfection and virtuosity over originality and expression. This opinion is reinforced in Samuel Gilmore’s article, “Tradition and Novelty in Concert Programming:
Bringing the Artist Back into Cultural Analysis,"¹⁰ in which he points to the standardization of aesthetic values caused by the inherent economic safety of conservative programming.

The joint production of both rational and innovative aesthetic foci generates an aesthetic tension in the concert world, with important consequences for the distribution of artistic resources and performance opportunities. There is a constant struggle, as there is in all culture-producing worlds, for social control over production resources among groups representing opposing interests. Where one set of aesthetic interests gains inordinate control over the allocation of concert resources and performance opportunities, the artistic character of that art world is altered. Repertory concert organization is an example of such a transformation. (p. 224)

Toscanini’s concert programs, Damrosch’s perpetual appeal to a broad audience¹¹, and even Bernstein’s Young People’s Concerts¹², while always entertaining, further cemented the commandments of our repertory aesthetic. Start with a fast one, then something slow, something old, (maybe) something new, something exciting, and make sure the audience knows what to expect!

I realize this generalization is not entirely fair, as again, innovation through virtuosity and interpretation is very real. Ardent exponents of new works will continue to emerge and challenge listeners. However, it is important for the rest of us to keep in mind that if a program is designed simply to appeal to the people who we know will already be in the audience, how can we expect a new generation of listeners to germinate from exhausted soil? Innovation in concert

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programming stretches the concert aesthetic, grabs new audiences, and expands the intellect. Without the performance conversation to introduce audiences to foreign musical visitors, it becomes all too easy to keep new music pushed to the fringe. Boulez himself understood the importance of explanation and accessibility, as evidenced by his programming and willingness to bring the audience closer to the music (literally and figuratively) through his “rug” concerts of the 1970’s. These concerts provided a unique seating option in which the audience was invited to sit comfortably on the floor, observing the orchestra (also seated on the main floor area) from a non-traditional vantage point.

We view the musical canon as a wealth of sacred standards, but they were not always such. At one point the pieces were not only introduced, but glorified or chastised through conversation, review, and dedicated listening. Some of the cornerstones of the canon were loathed after the first run, but perhaps riotous disgust was a strong enough reaction to spawn a second hearing. Today, premieres still abound in American orchestral performances, but second performances of new works for the same audience are few. When we allow audiences to hold new works alongside the canon but then just watch them dissolve into obscurity, we aren’t fighting hard enough for the rationale behind their existence. We aren’t providing the purpose, the meaning, or the layers of observation that inspired the programmatic selection, and are potentially relying on the impulse of one audience of varied experience and expectations to provide sustainability. I’ll continue to contend, with support, that denying the performance conversation to oneself and one’s audience is to welcome obscurity, indifference, and a poorly exercised artistic experience.

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I feel as though I have made Marcel Duchamp’s famous and bold assertion, placing the audience on an equal plane as the creator, a part of my everyday approach to communicating the musical experience. I feel so strongly that the creative act does not end with “the artist alone,” I insist that the student performers I coach speak to their audience. While I am sometimes met with resistance and reluctance, it is usually accompanied, in time, by understanding. It is another skill to practice, and one they often do not realize needs practice at all.

In order for students to begin thinking about how to better understand their audience and what topics and observations will appeal to them, they should begin to explore different types of performance environments. “Interactive performances” are a form of such exploration. By that, I am referring to situations in which both the performer and the audience are involved in an exchange of information that goes beyond the musical performance alone. The performer speaks to the audience, challenges them with questions and new ideas, or has a conversation with them. The audience may even engage through exercises that go beyond just active listening, to even include movement or other participatory activities. Performing in non-traditional venues and for audiences of varied experience levels can significantly impact the way we think about public speaking, active listening, and the overall impact of audience interaction. Juilliard strongly encourages students to use interactive performance as a vehicle for community outreach and audience building, and the Office of Community Engagement is at the center of this emphasis. An informed understanding of the diversity of audiences and the variety of ways to reach them reinforces how important it is for a performer to develop a range of conversational entry points selected from a variety of observations.

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14 “The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.” See: Marcel Duchamp. "The Creative Act." *Artnews*, vol. 56, no. 4 [June 1957], 28-29
II. INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE

1. Educational Benefits of Interactive Performances

Hundreds of Juilliard students take advantage of various programs and fellowships offered through the Office of Community Engagement. Many of these include interactive performances at less traditional venues such as schools, retirement communities, nursing homes, psychiatric wards, hospice care facilities, and many more. The students are charged with creating a collaborative, interdisciplinary performance program (involving music along with dance and/or drama) and incorporating public speaking and other activities as required components of their presentation. They engage the audience through stories, creative narratives, facts, and questions. They are trained to adapt their approach according to the anticipated audience, and to “read” and adjust according to the audience response.

Performances of this nature, for which there is an expectation or requirement for students to engage with the observer, are tremendous tools for enhancing speaking skills, as well as planning and programming competencies. Juilliard’s Director of Community Outreach provided some generous insight into the ways in which training for these types of performances can significantly enhance the students’ educational experience; especially their skills as communicators, and their understanding of how sharing their own musical observations may or may not be directly relevant to the listener experience. For many of our students, this is the first time they have considered the audience’s perspective, let alone considered the levels of observation that are worth sharing.
2. Interview – Teresa McKinney

Teresa McKinney is The Juilliard School’s Director of the Office of Community Engagement (formerly known as the Office of Educational Outreach). In that capacity, she oversees ten fellowships and outreach programs serving six city schools, fifty health care facilities, and five arts/cultural organizations. One hundred fifty Juilliard students participate in these extra-curricular programs each year and are given extensive training and ongoing guidance throughout their term. Through these activities, students learn how to perform in front of a non-traditional audience, as well as how to manage young people in classroom settings, research performance venues prior to arrival, adapt repertoire and spoken introductions to the experience level of their audience, and more.

I met with Ms. McKinney to gather additional details and her unique perspective of these benefits, and various specifics that also relate directly to the training students receive that enhances their abilities as speakers:

**Can you describe the kind of training the students taking part in these programs receive?**

“Students that apply to be a part of Community Engagement require professional development at the beginning of the year through an intensive. We address classroom management early on, as it is one of the big challenges of being a first-time teaching artist; going into a classroom and being able to take control. We also provide some basic guidance on lesson planning and curriculum design. This gets them thinking a lot about ‘why?’ ‘Why are you introducing the works that you are using for this audience?’ They have to consider how the material will be interesting for their class or audience. They consider why it is interesting to them as the performer. They also have to consider a

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15 [http://www.juilliard.edu/community-programs/engagement-programs](http://www.juilliard.edu/community-programs/engagement-programs)
variety of age groups and types of audiences. So, we run this kind of intensive over a three to four day period just before the school year.

Then they’re off! Their training ground is mostly in the actual setting. So, we place them in settings that are supportive; there is a principal, an assistant principal, and a teacher that works closely with our student. Our students submit lesson plans to us and to the classroom teacher prior to presenting them each week. This allows all of the overseers to observe and give feedback frequently on their communication and teaching abilities. There is always someone there observing.

The healthcare facilities are a little bit different. There is someone there to help the patients come into the setting, they meet the artist, they help set up, and really are more just there to provide general support. However, ahead of time our student has to be in contact with that person on-site so they know what to expect in each setting, how many people may be there, what are subjects or types of content to avoid, etc… Once they go into the facility, regardless of the ailment or issue, they will know in advance that there may be patients who have outbursts, or those who may walk out, or have to stand. The students have to be aware in advance. So, the training for our service fellows is a little different from the in-school training. We invite music therapists in to talk to our students. We like to give them at least a little information about the particular ailment or types of patients they will see. Things like multimedia or anything that involves flashing lights, for example, might bother the patients. Basically, you just have to be aware of what you are walking into.

We push the students to ask questions, adjust, but also create some sort of narrative with their program; tell a story about the music. When I arrived at Juilliard, the
format for these outreach performances mostly consisted of a brief introduction of the
performer and piece, and then just a play-through. We now try to really push them to
create some sort of more cohesive message, even if they are performing for groups of
varied experience and ability.”

Do you think preparing for these interactive performances causes our musicians to think
about music in different ways? If so, how?

“We often hear our students say their experiences do inform their performance. I
think it’s that they really learn more about why they love what they’re doing. The
audience really connects with them based on their love of the art form. It’s an intangible
benefit. They really notice that when in front of a smaller group, or particularly in front of
young people. Young people tend to be very honest. Children will say exactly what they
think or feel about the performance. That can really make a difference when designing
programs; and not just for children, but the experience also informs the way they program
for adults.”

How do you think public speaking impacts the listener experience in any of these settings?

“I think the public speaking aspect helps to bring the audience with them on the
journey. I think considering that journey is really important when designing the program.
The story being told should really just provide points of reference for the audience to be
able to follow along, so that they’re not ‘left alone.’ They have to use their imaginations.
I don’t mean to say that there has to be a lot of speaking, just that some guidance can help
the audience to come along with them.”

Have you seen situations in which public speaking can detract from a performance?
“Yes. We want the students to learn how to balance. Sometimes they go the direction of all music, no speaking; and other times they go for all interaction. We have to train them to find that balance. We want them to find the right words to allow the music to tell a story. It’s certainly a challenge for students. They have to practice and dig deep. The great thing is that the process really reminds them what they love about the pieces they are playing, and what makes them meaningful. If they don’t find the right words or talk too much, they’ll lose the audience.

There are those other intangibles, like their personality or sense of humor. It has to come across as genuine. The audience does want to know them, but they have to know how to present effectively.”

**What are some exercises do you and your staff take the students through in preparation, and what are those exercises intended to accomplish?**

“The first exercise is that we present the opportunity as a ‘job,’ and they have to apply. They have to prepare an application, prepare a lesson plan and interactive program, and submit a video. They send us a simple, raw video (ten minutes or so), just so that we can see their comfort level and presentation style. Our staff reviews each video as a panel, we then invite them in to do a presentation live. We often break down some essentials, like the basics of a lesson plan, and we also provide feedback. We ask what their goals are through the program. What points are they trying to convey to their audience? What age group are they appealing to? Is the language appropriate? Is the vocabulary too simple or too advanced? So, we go through everything from vocabulary to lesson structure. After that, if they advance, they move into the intensive process.
The exercises are really intended to reinforce a sense of professionalism. Even things like shaking hands, looking people in the eyes, those sorts of things are so significant. When we’re dealing with musicians, some of them have trouble simply looking up from their instrument. Beyond those basics, we need them to learn how to present and how to adapt. They learn to create an arc throughout the program. When they go into the training (after the interview), they know what it is that we’re really looking for before they go into the intensive training. We have so many different types of presenters and venues, we need them to be ready to speak and present to all kinds of audiences. Young people, families, the elderly; we’re called into all sorts of settings. Hopefully as they start to get the hang of it, they get more and more comfortable and are really prepared to do so many things when they graduate. They could do anything from a young people’s concert at Lincoln Center to a *Wee Bop* performance at Jazz at Lincoln Center, or go into any sort of school or healthcare facility and just be able to present and perform without reservation.”

**In what ways do you think preparing interactive performances can actually impact overall career development for musicians?**

“Well, for us we focus on Teaching Artistry. That’s a real, legitimate career now. When you become a principal player or dancer, you’re going to be called upon to speak on behalf of yourself or your organization. It could be a lecture, demonstration, workshop, or it could be teaching a course. As a leader, they’re going to come to you first. We want the students to be able to say ‘yes.’ Some artists are uncomfortable or incapable. We want our students to be prepared to represent their organization and themselves well. They need to be able to work with people and be able to understand
audiences. Whether they’re teaching a small trumpet class, or introducing an opera, it’s a skill set that can be honed and exercised. We want them to practice.”

3. Summary

One of the things I enjoy most about my work is that I get to prepare students and young professionals for performances in environments that are new to them, especially venues that may not normally host musical events. “Interactive performances” are not always as formally structured or straightforward as speaking from the stage during a concert. They do require the same type of planning in advance and on-site adaptation, but usually in an environment that is “low risk.” As Teresa McKinney discussed, Juilliard is quite intentional about creating opportunities for our students to perform in nontraditional settings, and walking into the “unknown” greatly improves their skills as communicators. It naturally forces them to consider different levels of observation in order to identify what concepts resonate most within each setting.

In a conservatory atmosphere, the primary objective (and I think rightfully so) is to prepare our students for careers as exceptional performers. They spend hours upon hours in the practice room, in rehearsals, and in performance. But as I will continue to argue throughout this document, developing speaking competencies through both curricular and co-curricular activities will provide students with a skill set that will open the door to a multitude of performance opportunities and additional career prospects, as well as new ways to look at their music that can enhance and inform their performance practice. Instructors should encourage their students to perform in low-risk situations that demand interaction with the audience, and provide essential feedback to the performer. Moving forward, I will discuss the main levels of observation that can
provide them with entry points for all types of interaction and discussion in varied performance environments.

III. LEVELS OF OBSERVATION

1. Foundational

This area is defined as the aural, visual, or physical aspects of a performance that serve as the fundamental basis for sound creation. This level of observation primarily involves how the musician is producing sound, moving, interacting with other musicians, and utilizing the performance space. The performer can observe the range of dynamics and how they are being produced physically, movement from surface to surface, gestures that support ensemble communication, and even the basic kinesthetic sensation of performance. The performer should also consider any unique sounds or extended techniques that may not be immediately recognized by the listener. Such observations and discussion can bring the listener into the performance experience on a more intimate level. For the musician, this heightened scrutiny can also enhance visual and kinesthetic memory.

Empathetic kinesthesis is another way to refer the perception of movement by an external observer. With the audience in mind, musicians can think of kinesthesia (or “visual kinesthesia”) as a way in which their own movement generates a physical sensation within the observer—a sort of physical empathy. A suggestion made by Mary M. Smyth in her article “Kinesthetic Communication in Dance” is that perceptual input (in this case provided by the performer) actually connects with the motor command system giving rise to sensations in the observer,
linked to past experiences of what that sort of movement feels like. Emotion, emphasis, and other intrinsic sensations can be interpreted by an audience through the performer’s body language—lifting the chin, closing one’s eyes, allowing hands to float or attack with forceful velocity—which are not unfamiliar sensations even to a non-musician.

Additionally, this idea of empathetic kinesthesis serves as a form of nonverbal communication among members of an ensemble. When teaching seminars in music appreciation to non-musicians, I often point out the different types of visual and physical communication that exist among members of an ensemble. These include movement and gestures, breathing, and eye contact, in addition to the ebb and flow of the music itself. These elements are often quite prevalent, particularly when observing an ensemble of great skill and experience. Movement that coincides with emotive elements they perceive within the melodies and harmonies adds to the interpretation, and in turn it emphasizes both the physical and emotional sensations that stir within an attentive listener.

With regard to the performers’ use of the performance space; there may be an opportunity, through communicating with one’s audience, to broaden perceptions of the physical atmosphere and release them from “directed listening,” or on an eyes-front mentality. A performance in a unique venue, or on an esteemed stage, might warrant mention of acoustics such as reverberation, reflection/bouncing of sounds off of particular features of the performance space, and proximity of the audience members to the stage. It’s not just an interesting consideration for the audience, but also an important factor for the performers to consider when establishing tempi, dynamics, and articulation. Percussionists in particular must consider the

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reverberation of a concert venue when selecting things as nuanced as cymbal sizes, bass drum mallets, and triangle beaters.

I once attended a workshop with renowned percussionist Steve Schick. He was providing a lecture-performance of Roger Reynolds’ rhythmically and texturally complex *Autumn Island* for solo marimba. The performance took place in the percussion studio at the Manhattan School of Music, a relatively dry space in terms of reverberation, but quite live in terms of acute sound. The marimba was particularly articulate in the space. Schick referenced the acoustics of the space as a reason for selecting the instrument he would use. A space with less reverberation, he felt, required an instrument with greater resonance. Additionally, his mallet selection was determined in part by his proximity to the audience.

I was most fascinated by the explanation of his choice of mallets. The four mallets were a mixture of yarn, cord, and hard rubber. The mallet variety of course gave him the ability to create a clear distinction between melodic voices, but he also explained that the different mallet constructions actually generated a sense of closeness or distance for the listener. The articulate hard rubber mallet had a clear, almost glassy response making the listener feel as though they are face-to-face with the rosewood bar. Whereas, the denser yarn mallet had a more masked articulation putting it at a perceived distance. In a piece so esoteric, explosive, and contrasting (a challenge to the average listener), I became transfixed by the concept of proximity as I listened with intensity.

**a. Value Proposition: Basic Foundational Entry Points**

In the context of this document, I use the term “value proposition” much like an entrepreneur would use it in an elevator pitch to a potential investor—the “bang for your buck,”
or guaranteed return. I am referring to a promise of actual benefits that the careful consideration and application of a given entry point or observation will provide for the audience. I ask that performers hypothesize whether or not a given fact or observation will enhance the listener experience and how. Do the benefits of sharing outweigh the potential risks of somehow burdening the listener or interfering with the music?

As previously noted, there are a number of different components of the foundational level of observation. Performers can consider and weigh each component based on its connection and relevance to the overall interpretation and listener experience. Where one piece by John Cage may warrant an explanation of how the piano was prepared, another piece by Beethoven may benefit more from a discussion of the performance space in comparison to the type of space for which the work may have been intended or first performed. For a percussionist, one striking implement may be more familiar than another, or an instrument may be completely foreign to the listener. Simple nuance from surface to surface may also benefit from explanation. Mention of these foundational components can inform the listener and provide an enhanced vocabulary.

b. Sample Considerations and Sound Observations

Before the performer can make assertions or decide what elements will be most compelling for the listener, he/she should consider a series of questions. An important part of the performance conversation is for the performer to have a clearer grasp of the musical decisions that are being made, and why those decisions are being made. After a personal examination, a determination can be made as to what should or should not be shared with the audience. Some sample considerations on the foundational level include the following:

- Is there anything about the instrumentation that warrants explanation?
• Does this piece utilize unusual sounds or extended techniques?
• Is the performance space unique, or being used in an unusual way?
• Is the visual configuration of the performer(s) nontraditional?
• Are there physical gestures, intentional or unintentional, that may have an impact on the listener-observer’s perception?
• Are there any significant visual cues?

Perhaps some of these observations seem too general, particularly within certain more traditional musical contexts. However, to use the word “general” as a blanket term would attach an almost belittling connotation when using it to describe substantive foundational analysis. We may think of general, foundational observations as being those of little significance and not particularly relevant to musical ideas, construction, or deep appreciation. Knowing the number of measures in a piece or number of keys on the piano provides about as much aesthetic insight into a piece of music as its opus number. However, if the listener is not guided through any initial confusion, it becomes difficult to sift through the foreign lingo and jumbled soundscape to find a real appreciation. The same rings true for the performer. If one fails to acknowledge, explore, and experiment with the foundational aspects of a work, then the potential for interpretive nuance is diminished. Sound creation is certainly a foundational element of music making, and ways in which sound is created, spaces are utilized, and visuals are incorporated will most certainly impact the listener experience, and a clear explanation (when necessary) can provide a bridge beyond what may be a significant psychological barrier for a less-experienced observer.

Countless contemporary works suggest a need for examination and explanation of the overall circumstances of performance and the foundational elements. When a performer, during a classical recital, strides to a spotlight in the middle of the stage wearing nothing but white canvas
trousers and armed with only their voice and extremities, a perplexed audience would likely benefit from conversation (before or after performance). Vinko Globokar’s ?Corporel is such a work.

While the piece offers heady instructions, specific rhythms, and elaborate notation, there is room for flexibility and expansion. Such is evident in the number of recordings with significantly varied durations. My first performance of the work was not a success. After the initial expected audience murmurs subsided, I slapped through my interpretation. It was too slow and too segmented. I treated my body solely as an instrument and the notation as sacred. I didn’t consider the piece to be a work of performance art, but rather, a work of temporal precision. There was a pretty long pause at the end of the piece (another indicator, I felt, that my interpretation was far too segmented), followed by conservative applause. I watched my recorded performance days later, but nothing was more telling than the questions I received from the audience after the recital. What was that? How did you make those sounds? Were you really hitting yourself that hard? Is that written down? Did that hurt?

That first round of interrogation emphasized for me the benefit of discussing the foundational level of observation. It seemed that a majority of the questions I received had a lot less to do with phrase structure, melody, or rhythmic content, and much more to do with how I looked, how sounds were being generated, and what was actually happening. So I dissected the foundational observations to consider what impact they might actually have on a new audience.

I appreciated the element of surprise coming from the attire, the darkened stage, and the spotlight (as instructed by the composer). I believed the audience did as well. Therefore, coming to the front of the stage for a public statement prior to performance would inherently diminish the “shock value.” I decided that comments, if any, should be held for the end of the
performance, placed in the program notes, or delayed for the lobby after. More importantly, I knew that I had to do something about my segmented interpretation. Looking back at my marked-up sheet music, it was clear that I was too intentional about learning the work in “chunks,” without spending enough time threading them together to form cohesive thoughts. The most challenging foundational question I considered was that of how the sounds were made. As much time as I had spent preparing for the performance, I had barely considered the infinite variations of sound quality and intensity from one slap or scratch to another. If I was to attach a particular thought or aesthetic to a passage, then it made sense to adjust my technique and explore the tactile sound palette.

The same concert program also included an ethereal work with its own set of foundational considerations. Frederik Andersson’s *Not everything which happens is in the newspaper* is a work for solo marimba published in 2008. Aside from a few theoretic observations, particularly the work’s overall binary structure, my self-evaluation and prioritization of the pivotal levels of observation was challenging. The piece is sparse with just a few notes per measure. The tempo is a relatively lethargic quarter note = 60bpm. While there seemed to me to be a haunting essence—points of abstraction like loneliness, sorrow, and remorse—I did not necessarily want to pass along my preconceived imagery to an audience new to the work. There was a way for them to discover their own story within the work through describing the foundational characteristics. I discussed resonance and range, the challenge of subduing the visual impact of the seemingly extreme physicality required for a four to five octave reach, and the types of down strokes intended to mute the bars.
Not everything which happens is in the newspaper

Fig. 1. Fredrik Andersson, *Not everything which happens is in the newspaper*, page 1. Copyright 2008 by PM Europe Publications
Marcel Duchamp’s understanding of music was such that space was of equal significance to notes on the temporal plane. Cage also observed that the time of travel of each sonority creates a three-dimensional sensory image. A component of Duchamp’s *Sculpture Musicale* is its nature as a stagnant happening rather than a musical event, as its experimental sonic components are intended to provide the listener with a sense of finite sound coming from different points in space. A sound sculpture of this nature would then be quite different depending on the location of the listener, the size of the space, and even subtle variations in the placement of “instruments.” Knowing about this piece, I drew a loose comparison to Andersson’s work on this foundational level. While the notes are sparse, they cannot help but wash the walls of any space with sound. “Dead” strokes may mute the bar’s natural resonance, but the performance space has the ultimate say with regard to reverberation.

Therefore; my foundational observations were: 1. the impact of proximity between the listener and the instrument; 2. resonance, as it pertains to the space in which the piece is played; and 3. articulation and its ability to also accentuate proximity. Not all marimba solos utilize articulations of tenuto, legato and dead stroke (+). Because my foundational observations had more to do with proximity and space, I considered Andersson’s articulations as a way to heighten the sense of proximity. In the previously mentioned workshop that I attended, Steve Schick described the use of articulation, mallet hardness, and stroke velocity as a means to bring the listener closer and farther from the instrument without actually moving. I was most struck by the idea of staccato bringing the listener’s ear all the way to the marimba bar. A crisp articulation was not unlike putting your ear within inches of someone’s mouth when they speak to you. You

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hear each tic, hiss, and nuance with extreme clarity, versus the more amalgamated speech heard from a distance. Therefore legato creates distance and staccato creates closeness, or even intimacy. Needless to say, I had a lot of content that I could share with an audience should I choose to do so, but the thought process alone was an important exercise for the development of my interpretation.

c. Justifying Interpretation of Foundational Observations

Gunther Schuller, an avid proponent of attention to detail and accuracy in interpretation of American contemporary music in particular, acknowledges the expanding capabilities of modern performers as soloists and members of ensembles. He is also critical of the practice of learning the notes first, and waiting to add dynamics and articulations that are important to the formal structure at the end of the learning process. Andersson’s work, and works by other contemporary composers such as Vinko Globokar, Brian Ferneyhough, Roger Reynolds, and Milton Babbit (among many others), rely on dynamics, articulations, and other layers of gradation as key structural components. While some may look at rhythm, notes, and harmonic function as cornerstones of melodic development, they may miss out on the critical functions of things like dynamics and timbre; the “tone-color melody.” I appreciate this particular passage from an article written by Schuller entitled “American Performance of New Music”

Consider, for example, the average musician’s ability to cope with just two of the ideas most prevalent in today’s new music: various uses of Klangfarbenmelodie (timbre melody) and its extension into pointillism. In both, the single performer’s previous role as an individualistic carrier of the melodic-expressive component is transformed into a

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The player no longer bears an entire melodic burden, but is asked to share it in specific ways with other instruments and players. Tone-color melody, in its most orthodox sense as a kind of “melodic dovetailing” distributed among several instruments, requires a degree of attack-and-release precision and timbral control that most players are totally unprepared for. (p. 2-3)

This passage is particularly applicable to percussionists charged with creating a sensible formal arc of dynamics and articulations, but across an array of surfaces that have drastically different timbral qualities. Even using a seemingly homogenous instrument like the marimba bears challenges that the listener may not even understand unless they know how to listen. A marimba is a collage of colors, sound durations, and qualities in and of itself. It is an imperfect instrument that becomes quite personal to the performer. Presenting the Andersson work to an audience along with a discussion of the imperfect, yet beautiful qualities and challenges of the instrument could enhance the listeners’ experience by enhancing their ability to hear not just harmonic development, but also timbral and dynamic nuance. As you saw in the example, simplicity and nuance in sound creation (depending on the performer’s interpretation) may be the basis of audience appeal, with the timbre melody superseding any harmonic or traditional melodic structures. Unique and diverse articulations and a broad note range become defining characteristics.

Dynamics are an essential component of interpreting new music. While dynamics fall more within what I define as the theoretic realm of observation, the actual physical velocity or trajectory (which is a foundational component) is important to the listener’s understanding of the dynamic itself and its function. Again, Schuller says:\(^{19}\):

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\(^{19}\) Schuller, "American Performance and New Music."
While rhythmic problems involve both performers and composers, questions of dynamics lie mainly in the hands of performers. Here again, there is a long-held tradition of bad habits, such as the ignoring of dynamics in all but the final stages of rehearsal, the absence of any precise definition of loudness degrees, and a general failure to understand their function. With today’s tendency to abstract dynamics and give them a more functional role, their imprecise rendering is no longer merely a matter of carelessness or poor interpretation; now it subverts and annuls a vital structural element, in terms of which one no longer can speak of a “poor” performance, but rather of a “wrong” one. (p. 6-7)

This attention to physical, as well as musical detail requires extreme control and enlightened mental ability.

The value proposition for analyzing the foundational observations is to provide a heightened listener experience. In the previous example, space and proximity, while mere physical concepts, have the ability to elevate the experience to the very personal concept of intimacy. While Cage may argue that the physical or foundational elements of the work are all that one needs in order to experience the full intention of a work (whereby the sound is the work), I would contend that a more informed appreciation goes beyond foundational components, advancing to the areas of narrative and profound observations. The examples provided in this section are intended to demonstrate how an explanation of the foundational constructs, to quote Duchamp, “brings the work in contact with the external world,” allowing for the listener’s “deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications.”

Before we concern ourselves with inner listening—which will later be discussed in the more personal contexts of narrative and profound observations—we should acknowledge that the impetus for the inner is the creation of sound itself. Sound can cause a physical reaction within various parts of the body, in many cases physical tension. Tension and release—pain and relaxation—are the basis of human emotion. Sound falls within this spectrum of sensation; at times invigorating, and at others terrifying.

A thorough understanding of the sound itself of course informs the overall technical approach to the instrument, and this truest understanding also allows for a limitless and multi-dimensional palette of options within a single note. I openly admit that I sometimes struggle finding a soul within dry rudimental snare drum solos. A return to the foundational level of observation, reminding myself of the mechanical complexity of each gesture, guides my musical interpretation and reignites the curiosity associated with the process of motion initiating sound. We receive a great deal of guidance in this area through lessons, master classes, and even competitions, which give tremendous feedback about which hand is doing what and how.

Once I’ve had the conversation with myself, I consider the value of relaying each observation to my audience. Contemporary music, particularly when played for an inexperienced audience, often begs for insight. Even music that is traditional to our ears bears (or should bear) musicians’ technical scrutiny applied to each motion. An understanding of at least some of the technical considerations has the potential to enhance the listener experience, especially if it guides the audience to and through successive levels of observation. I return to my example of Globokar’s Corporel, a piece that is physically demanding, and painful at times. Tension and release—pain and relaxation—are at the core of this piece, and for the audience to know that the
self-inflicted pain is not just an act but a reality, gives them the visceral emotional response that I hope to achieve.

![Percussionist Steve Schick in performance of Globokar's ?Corporel, in the midst of the work’s many strikes and scratches.](image)

Fig. 2. Percussionist Steve Schick in performance of Globokar’s ?Corporel, in the midst of the work’s many strikes and scratches.  

In the same way that a physical understanding of this work of “body percussion” and vocalization gives both kinesthetic empathy and emotional insight into the composition, subtle snare drum observations in a different work can also enhance the listener experience through empathy and expectation. An audience’s introduction to how a buzz is created against the drum, as well as the vibration from the tip of the stick through the fingers’ fulcrum can likewise provide a deeper meaning.

In a sense, I’m arguing that physical sensation, generated by direct contact or reverberation, is the foundation of human emotion. We can paint an emotional picture for our

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audience with a story, but ultimately the story will conjure sensation. Analysis of the foundational material is a shortcut to sensation, and can easily segue to the visceral. For a performer who is fearful of imposing their emotional journey, a foundational entry point can still connect the audience to the core of emotion; the energy and terror of an applied gesture and its resulting tone.

**d. Performance/Conversational Considerations**

I would encourage performers to incorporate these questions into their performance conversation, with the understanding that not every question must be answered or addressed for the audience. While some of the answers are obvious, others may require some reflection. The purpose of these “Q&A” exercises is to allow the performer to think things through, rather than assume during the process of preparation that everything will come naturally or instinctually to the performer or to the listener. The subsequent exercise is intended to allow the performer to apply their answers in practice.

- What important foundational elements are likely to be misunderstood or missed completely by the listener?
- How would a clear understanding of the foundational elements of a work enhance the listener experience?
- What sensory issues, experienced by the performer, could be relayed to the audience?
- In what ways does interpretation impact the physical manipulation of sound?
- Is there a novel or unique aspect of the way sound is being created?
- Will the audience understand or appreciate the performer’s description of the foundational elements? (Example: Are there extended techniques that are already
self-explanatory, or conversely, are there techniques that are too difficult to explain to the layperson?)

- Does the performance space impact or enhance the overall quality of sound?
- Do other extra-musical factors contribute to the quality of sound?

e. Exercise

1. Consider all types of sound being generated. Take note of the various types of sound and the ways in which they are created (plucked vs. struck; bowed vs. scraped).
2. Consider the ways in which your interpretation is impacted by the type of sound and the technique required to produce it. If the technique is standard, consider ways in which technique enables you to create a unique performance.
3. Describe your ideal sound and how you hope to achieve it.

2. Theoretic/Historical

This level of observation (which I sometimes refer to as “concrete”) includes accurately defined elements of form, style, phrase structure, meter, historical context, informed performance practice, and any other analytical facts pertinent to the music being performed. The performer should consider the experience level of the audience (children, adults, experienced listeners, etc…), the type of performance (educational, interactive, entertainment, etc…), and the type of venue (formal concert hall, art gallery, middle school cafegymatorium, etc…). The performer will likely find that this more concrete level of observation is the most straightforward in terms of research and discussion (just the facts). However, the amount and type of “sharing” with the audience should be shaped according to the level of interest and experience they represent. Just
as providing an intense level of detail or formal analysis can go “over the head” of an inexperienced listener, a simple explanation of fundamentals could easily offend or bore a qualified concertgoer.

Additionally, the performer should consider the relevance of certain concrete observations. Historical context may be irrelevant to the character of a piece or the nature of the environment in which a work was composed, and could distort the listener experience. The overall character of much of Erwin Schulhoff’s String Quartet No. 1, for example, would not necessarily be well-encapsulated by repeated reference to his murder during the Holocaust. And everything written by Beethoven doesn’t require a reminder that the composer suffered from hearing loss later in life. The story behind a composition could be born out of any number of factors; a commission, a story or text, a moment of inspiration on a subway, or current events. Unless the performer is confident in the composer’s intent, inaccurate or poorly considered speculation could be perceived as a violation of integrity.

In my interview with Joseph Polisi, the President of Juilliard (included later in this document in its entirety), he agrees, along with many of his colleagues that the personal connection and humanity behind public speaking is typically the most compelling for an audience. However, when considering a discussion of these theoretic/historical observations, accuracy is of the utmost importance. An educated audience will scrutinize the performer’s correctness in the same way that a less experienced audience might instead scrutinize the performer’s poise and personality. A lack of clarity or the appearance of uncertainty will most certainly be a distraction and will weaken the overall integrity of the performance.

It may also be unnecessary to convey the mechanics or structure of a piece of music, particularly if the element being described has the potential to be distracting. A percussive work
with a “Latin” influence may have a pervasive clavé underlying rhythmic pattern throughout. However, just because a rhythm is pervasive does not always mean that it is more important than the melody, counterpoint, or composite musical experience. Placing too much significance on one rhythmic or structural component has the potential to tether the listener to a specific element that is less significant to the overall schema. At the same time, providing a melodic or structural point of reference can be helpful for listeners enduring a particularly lengthy work; even more so if the melodic point of reference also has narrative significance. Pianist Michael Shinn (also interviewed for this document) believes that for certain colossal works that challenge an audience’s concentration and attentiveness, the performer can provide some melodic points of reference in order to anchor and give the listener some signposts and moments of comfort and familiarity.

While performance practice is also an important factor in preparation and execution for the musician, it is in many ways largely composed of personal experience, education, lineage, reflection, and creative license. The performer must be careful not to over-shape the listener experience by imposing elements associated with performance practice that are personal or more relevant to the performer than the listener. The performer’s creative decisions may be based on commentary, gestures, physicality, and history of the performance of a work by other preeminent musicians. The instruments themselves may also play a factor. Period bows and instruments require a different type of nuance than modern instruments. Marimbists often “cover” Bach’s Cello Suites, and some choose to shape the lines with the fluidity and nuance of a solo cellist. Others may choose to take greater ownership of the work and accentuate characteristics that are more distinctly associated with their own instrument (i.e. variance of articulation based on mallet density or striking location on the bar; “voicing” of the musical line based again on mallet
sticking, etc…). If the performer is attempting to emulate the sound of a cello, perhaps that is worth sharing with an audience; but if the performer is making a concerted effort to create a sound that is distinctively a marimba aesthetic, then perhaps that element would better be defined by the listener through their own perception.

Before emphasizing the theoretic and historical components of a work, the performer must consider why this information might be relevant to the listener. Every audience and venue has a context, and every program should have some sort of reason for its construction. If the environment or programmatic rationale is closely tied to these concrete observations, then such descriptions would seem both organic and genuine. Otherwise, the performer runs the risk of filling space or “killing time” with a laundry list of facts and figures; an encyclopedic rendering of know-it-all rhetoric.

a. Value Proposition: Music Analysis

What difference does it make if the audience knows anything about phrase structure, meter, cadence, or any of the formulaic aspects of a piece of music? The performer speaking about these concerns does demonstrate an adherence to the integrity of the music, and the audience acquires a clearer picture of the amount of know-how and intellectual energy it takes to be both convincing and accurate. At the same time, much as with foundational observations, the performer may be giving the audience a new vocabulary and new lens through which to observe the musical experience. Many of the analytical components of a musical work are not just stagnant facts, they are also universal characteristics shared by a given genre. Enhancing the listener’s vocabulary within one piece or program may thereby increase their musical fluency and understanding of future performances.
Emotive elements are also easily associated with many of these concrete and analytical components of music. Ideas of anxiety, tension, or angst could easily be created through mixed meter and unpredictable agogics. Relief and rest are often found in a V-I cadence. Phrase structure can also serve as a clear road map. Understanding that these are not simply lines in a complex equation, but are instead the concrete building blocks that make the extra-sensory experience possible, further empowers the listener with tools of effective listening and understanding.

b. Value Proposition: Historical Context

The historical significance of a particular work may be relevant to the program, the venue, the audience, or to a broader through-line the performer hopes to achieve. I want to reemphasize the importance that the performer’s information be accurate, but also that it be relevant to the event. Not only that, but the facts shared should also be relevant to the performer’s interpretation. There are a number of factors that go into determining what elements of historical context are worth sharing with the audience.

Three hundred years of performance practice evolution separates us from the first performances of the music of J.S. Bach. Interpretations have evolved based on everything from education to instrument design. The performer therefore needs to consider if any historical reference to performance practice actually aligns with their own interpretation. “In the mid to early 1700’s this work was played with a stronger emphasis on the third beat of each measure.” Is that comment particularly useful if the performer chooses to accentuate beat one or two in actual execution? It certainly could be, as long as the performer clarifies or justifies the alternate choice in accent pattern. Conversely, if the performer is able to justify the musical and extra-
musical elements of the performance as being based on a carefully protected and handed-down tradition, it could indeed give the audience a warmth of perspective, knowing that they as listeners are now a part of a historical tradition.

Many composers have interesting stories. However, the performers should at least consider whether or not greater or lesser-known chapters of a composer’s biography directly apply to the piece being performed, as well as whether they apply to the programmatic narrative. As was previously mentioned, just because the composer had a colorful life of triumph or strife, does not mean that the piece of music being performed was directly influenced by those incidents most underscored by his/her biographer, or mentioned most frequently in an undergraduate music appreciation course. The performer should determine in what way the historical elements will enhance the listener experience, and not just scatter the discussion with “fun facts.”

c. Sample Considerations:

- What is the experience level of the audience (general audience, trained musicians, etc…)?
- What is the context of the performance (venue, date, location, current events, etc…)?
- Will reference to theory or history enhance the listener experience?
- How has your knowledge of theory and history influenced your interpretation?
- Can the historical context support the narrative level of observation? (Does it provide an accessible story or narrative?)
Do these observations provide a conversational through-line for the program?
(Are the pieces on the program historically connected, or of similar construction?)

3. Narrative

This area of observation includes aspects of creativity, emotion, expression, imagery, and story. The performer should research the composer’s own descriptions or storylines applied to a work (if available), or may choose to craft a narrative that gives the listener a figurative “road map” to guide them through the piece. Narrative observations are particularly useful with longer works or those that may present a challenge of endurance or complexity for the audience. Consider approaching narrative concepts in ways that are relatable and relevant to the experience level of the audience. The way both concrete and narrative observations are presented will likely differ in that the former is a discussion of fact rather than abstract concepts (see discussion of instructional strategies in the later section about this level of observation).

The narrative area of observation is rather subjective, and one could argue that a story or even a colorful title applied by the composer may or may not comfortably encapsulate the performer’s interpretation. Percy Grainger often addressed his audience prior to performance, something that was less common in his day. In a 1948 recording of his performance of Debussy’s “Pagodes” (from “Estampes”), Grainger precedes his performance with a brief speech. He describes Debussy’s music as heavily influenced by jazz harmonies, as well as beautiful music of Javanese “gong orchestras.”

…The piece I’m going to play you now is not an exact transcription of what he heard from the Javanese orchestras in 1888. Some of the passages in it are European chords with some Oriental influence, but most of the passages are truly transcriptions of Oriental
music, and the most important innovation is that just as Orientals on the whole are unwilling to kill animal and insect life when they meet it, just gently laying it aside; so also, they are unwilling to kill tones that are being brought into life. The tones in the Javanese gong orchestras are never dampened. They sing on, and it makes less of a problem in their music than in ours because the intervals of the scale are so arranged that they are all harmonious, one with another. The piece I am about to play is called “Pagodes,” by Debussy.\(^\text{22}\)

Grainger’s description of these narrative elements of the work is noticeably reinforced by his theoretic/historical research into the background context of Debussy’s compositional influence. However, he does a remarkable job of painting a picture, drawing a connection between life and death and the natural decay of musical tones.

### a. Sample Considerations

- Has the composer provided insight into narrative or emotional elements of the composition?
- Does the title of the work (or movement) evoke a particular story or image?
- Is the piece programmatic in nature?
- How might foundational, historical, or theoretic observations support this narrative?
- Have you as the performer developed a through-line or narrative to assist in execution?

In what ways do you hope to shape the listener experience?

b. Coaching the Narrative

When I coach students who are honing their public speaking skills, I very often try to maintain a sense of humor and levity. The experience of speaking to the audience is often one of extreme anxiety, so I usually try to alleviate stress by infusing “play.” Eric Booth, in The Everyday Work of Art\(^{23}\), quotes Heraclitus’ maxim: “Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play.” The sense of imagination and play is often lost when a musician moves out of the headspace of expression and into that of perfection. As Joseph Polisi expressed to me in his interview, the skill of moving out of one artistic function—that of the performer—into the verbal, more analytical role of a speaker is an awkward transition for many. The pursuit of perfection can generate a manufactured impersonation of spontaneity or a performance lacking life and breath. Every gesture is the result of prep and technique.

In contrast, Booth describes the experience of “play” as similar to that of Csíkszentmihalyi’s flow:

It is done entirely for its own sake; it is always new; it taps directly into what you know, bypassing interpretation and explanation; it bears no responsibility beyond the moment; it is unself-conscious; it distorts the sense of time; it seeks control within different kinds of order; it tells the truth. (p. 125)

Every phrase and gesture of the performance conversation should at least feel as though it is infused with spontaneity in the moment, or else it can come across as forced or inorganic.

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Therefore, I attempt to eventually get students away from the script and outline, and into an extemporaneous mode of thinking. Humor and play often open a doorway to the narrative elements. While students may be able to point out the theory or performance practice behind their interpretation, they may not have taken the time to consider a narrative. They haven’t taken time to color their interpretation with creativity and humanity. The narrative level of observation provides the audience with a story behind the music. Performers reveal to them a sense of flow, and can connect beyond notes, rhythms, and dynamics.

Despite the shortcomings behind Walter Damrosch’s blanket narratives of the “NBC Music Appreciation Hour,” he was largely responsible for the canonization of certain classical repertoire for decades to come due to his application of relatable narrative. His approach for children emphasized narrative as the most substantive component of the music; superseding form and structure, but in effect pigeon-holing the listener experience. He spoke in assertions rather than presuppositions, but at least he knew how to tell a story. Regarding Beethoven:

Unthinking people, who couldn’t understand this strange, scowling lad, often laughed at him for his queer, wild ways. They couldn’t see that in his heart Ludwig was really a strongly affectionate boy who loved his friends dearly. Even his playmates—for Ludwig did of course play sometimes, though rarely—never could understand why at times he refused to play when they asked him to join in a merry game, but would steal away and moodily sit alone and apart.

Is there danger in priming the listener with an abstract assertion or specific narrative prior to performance? I would contend that, yes, there is a risk of shaping a listener experience too rigidly. That is why it is important that the performance conversation—when discussing the
narrative level of observation—be clear that it is as the performer’s opinion; either that or the true and documented word of the composer.

4. Profound

This most personal level of observation requires the performer to find their own meaning or sense of personal and emotional attachment to a piece or program. It allows the performer to convey their personality and approach to a work. It also provides the audience with deeper insight into the creative process. This should be one of the most personal, human, and carefully considered observations. In my conversation with jazz guitarist and teacher Rodney Jones (also included in its entirety near the end of this document), he speaks in great detail about the why of art. It is of great importance to him that both he and his students understand the multitude of reasons why they do what they do, why they choose their interpretation, why they have chosen to perform a piece, and what they are offering to their audience. This idea has been reinforced repeatedly in my conversations and interviews with dozens of professionals throughout my research for this document, and my career. It is of the utmost importance when performers speak to the audience that they bring sincerity, a genuine interest and concern, and a display of humanity.

As with the narrative level, imposing a story, personal event, or emotional vocabulary has the potential to over-shape the experience for the listener. The performer will most certainly have a completely different emotional attachment to a piece of music than the listener. The performer has spent time with the piece, grown with it, and concurrently experienced life as it surrounded the learning process. It could be detrimental, or even uncomfortable for an audience member to essentially be told what to feel.
Rather than share an in-depth emotional dialog with the audience, a more appropriate technique may be to pose a question to the audience prior to performance, allowing them the opportunity to apply their own emotional narrative. For example, prior to the performance of a lengthy Schubert sonata, a pianist might describe the work as “moving” and “personal,” but rather than apply structured descriptors like “heartbreaking,” “angry,” or “ferocious,” he/she might instead invite the audience to consider their own emotional response as the piece progresses and develops. Following the performance, an enriching conversation may even take place between the performer and audience (from the stage or even in the lobby), because the performer has allowed the audience to take part in the creative process. It is not at all uncommon for a performer’s own interpretation to be rightfully impacted by the response of an audience. Suppose an audience member felt “subtle remorse,” when the performer wished to project “agonizing sorrow.” Might the performer consider altering their performance strategy in the future?

**a. Sample Considerations:**

- How does the piece make you feel?
- What initially drew you to the work?
- Where were you, and what were you doing when you were inspired to take on this work?
- What storylines or emotive elements have helped shape your approach to the music?
- How have you applied your own life experience to your interpretation?
- What do you want your audience to feel after hearing your performance?
• In what way(s) has this piece had an impact on you as a performer and as an individual?

Pitfalls of a Restricted Perspective

While I argue that the narrative and profound levels of observation are perhaps those which house the true artistry behind a musical work, there are some dangers the performer should consider before imposing a storyline, emotion, or image to a particular note, instrument, or theme. Such imposed plotlines and landscapes can restrict the audience perspective, particularly the less experienced audience looking to the performer for explicit guidance. An example of this is Adorno’s criticism of the classroom pedagogical materials intended to accompany NBC’s “Music Appreciation Hour” in the late 1930’s and early 40’s (from his Analytical Study of the “NBC Music Appreciation Hour”). While presenting itself as a method for the listener to discover and explore music from the outside to the inside through a pragmatic approach, the mechanics and building blocks of music are almost immediately attached to an imposed narrative or emotion. Children are taught to hear a particular instrument as a “character,” for example, despite the fact that the musical examples may very well pre-date programmatic music altogether. This forced perspective may attach a completely nonsensical meaning to a piece of music, and detract from the composer or performer’s intent.

To attach an emotion or image to one particular sound, phrase, or theme, can restrict the audience’s ability to listen beyond that predefined idea to hear the harmony, counterpoint, and nuance that make up the entirety of the work. Particularly for young audiences, this sort of figurative attachment perhaps makes the listening experience too “easy.” An understanding or appreciation of the music should come from a composite experience; one in which all of the
components are granted equal merit, and ultimately sorted according to the uniqueness and application of one’s own intellect.

Socialized commodity listening has really thrown musicians under the bus. It is harder to connect with an audience that you are attempting to challenge intellectually than with one you are just trying to entertain. This is why the narrative and profound levels of observation should be vividly explored through one’s own musical preparation, and carefully dealt with through audience communication. Performers should consider providing a psychological doorway to an idea or emotion, rather than a specific description. Jackson Pollock once described his explosive method of splashing and splattering paint onto the canvas as a means for expressing his feelings rather than illustrating them.\textsuperscript{24} With contemporary music in particular, musicians can open the psychological doorway for the listener to fully and uniquely experience a work, with fewer socialized encumbrances.

By “socialized encumbrances,” I am referring to the ingrained associations that particular sounds, modes, and melodies induce for an audience who may even be hearing a particular piece of music for the first time. An interval occurrence, intended to be stark or even subsidiary, may be distracting because the audience recognizes it as one so closely identified with “Happy Birthday.” Communicating with an audience should therefore be taken very seriously. The way we present an idea or opinion can easily create a permanent connotation for the listener, perhaps even damaging their experience with future performers.

What We Say and How We Say It

Dale Carnegie once said, “There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it.”\(^{25}\) (p. 159) All four line items speak to what we are considering in this prolonged discussion (particularly the last two), and the wisdom behind the quote really captures some of what it takes to be a great performer. Great performers are not just those who can get behind their instrument and produce a note-perfect rendition. The truly great performers are those who provide a unique and interesting perspective. They display confidence and not just competence, fluidity and not just fluency, and the ability to communicate visually, musically, and orally. We are in the midst of an era in which performers are becoming better and better, and yet success is not often achieved in our industry because of flawless technique alone. Effective communication and interaction with one’s audience is a unique and distinguishing factor that can truly elevate a performer’s profile on stage and in their broader career.

Public speaking as an expression of humanity and personality also becomes a massive component of a performer’s brand identity. In an age in which technology makes music and musicians accessible 24 hours a day, anywhere in the world, and hundreds of recordings exist at a click or a keystroke, modern musicians are becoming more and more defined by who they are and not just how they play. The artist’s connection to the audience on a personal level contributes greatly to their following and fan base. Carnegie would concur that the musical message is not just about influencing people through emotion and interpretation, but also about making friends.

IV. THE CASE FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

1. Misplaced Reverence for Silence

As I often contend, many young artists are unable to articulate how or why they make their creative decisions. There is somewhat of a reverence toward a kind of conservatory model or aesthetic of musical training, which is one enriched but at times oversaturated with emphasis on rehearsal and introspection as opposed to any sort of emphasis on conversational interaction. Conservatory students may spend 40 hours per week (in some cases more) in rehearsal and practice settings in which they are unable to exercise interpersonal and intellectual communication skills and yet, artists are often touted as expert communicators for their ability to express emotion through a creative medium.

Exercises outside of performance activities—often viewed as ancillary to the study of technique—are important to the conversational and emotional vocabulary of the performing artist. In my current role at Juilliard, I seek opportunities to encourage student interaction through educational workshops, lectures, and intensives, while pointing to ways in which these activities can inform both the performer’s communicative and musical abilities. In 2014, I initiated a series of student “mastermind discussion groups” and roundtables which were intended to bring students with similar interests—pertinent to entrepreneurship in particular—into a safe, interactive space in which they could share ideas, cross-pollinate, and inspire one another to take the next steps in their creative ideation process. I incorporated staff, faculty, alumni, and other industry professionals into these discussions as well.

Prior to the introductory exchange of names and interests between the students, I met briefly with the staff and faculty to discuss the importance of allowing the students to serve as the primary conversation drivers, and for us to serve as passive observers, sounding boards, or as
resources should questions arise. Additionally, I asked my colleagues to make themselves aware of ways in which the students interact with each other in conversations not directly related to performance and compare them to conversations that might happen in a rehearsal setting between members of a chamber ensemble.

The consensus among my colleagues, as the discussion group wrapped up, was that the students were much more comfortable speaking about and sharing ideas that were not closely related to their area of primary study (music performance) than they often tend to be when discussing music in rehearsal settings. They seemed to be more at ease talking about business models, online sales platforms, video editing software, and social media (all topics of which they were far from experts) than students spending time on musical tasks in a string quartet rehearsal. It was almost as though a certain barrier of perfectionism was alleviated. They were less intimidated by their peers and the faculty members present, less concerned about saying the wrong thing, and more open to receiving feedback or corrections.

One problem I see is that students often avoid conversational interaction in order to spend more time on the notes, fully engaged in phrase repetition, alignment, and mathematical accuracy. It seems as though the extra-musical elements are not as important of a consideration. They seem to assume that interpretation will occur organically through repetition. I question whether musicians sacrifice efficiency in rehearsal when they opt to go this repetitive route, rather than have an open dialog. I have often considered chamber music to be an extremely important tool in opening the floodgates of conversation about musical interpretation. Through rehearsing chamber music, students uncover their empathy and understanding of ideas that are in opposition to their own, and learn to offer and/or accept those ideas through verbal communication.
I am generally concerned that reverence for mechanics over creative exploration will ultimately yield performances that are more and more homogenized as future generations of musicians progress. It can be difficult for a student violinist to communicate to a musical colleague the reason why a certain phrase should rise or fall purely based on a because-I-said-so demonstration or play-through. It’s important that the musician be able to verbally convey the foundational, narrative, or other elements that validate the creative choice being made. The transfer of information from teacher to student is certainly not often made without context, reason, or some sort of analysis. Among the less communicative young artists, conversation is also avoided within themselves when working on solo repertoire.

I thought it would be interesting (albeit somewhat entertaining) to take a look at some research regarding emotional understanding and communication between romantic couples. For years I have heard long-standing chamber ensembles, duos, and other close-knit collaborative partnerships compare the relationship that they have to a marriage of sorts. I was curious to see if there was a correlation between exercising verbal communication skills and an increase in empathy and understanding among the parties that is perhaps deeper than just conversational acknowledgement.

I came across an older (though still applicable) study in *The Family Coordinator* entitled “Premarital Communication Skills Education with University Students.” The study involved six couples who were dating. Through a series of taped exercises and feedback sessions, the participants’ knowledge of communication greatly increased and the partners also increased their amount of self-disclosure. The self-disclosure piece I found particularly important, as it demonstrates that through open communication and feedback, one becomes not only more

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attuned to the person across from them, but also more comfortable communicating. It would be
fair to say that musicians who communicate verbally and frequently may benefit from that
impetus of self-disclosure, and to become more self-aware.

Some of the results of the experiment were achieved through what I consider a sort of
“forced empathy” involving role-play and behavioral rehearsal. The same kind of empathy is
often achieved in chamber music rehearsals. Listening, rationalizing, and implementing a
musical change that is somewhat foreign is much like utilizing role-play as an exercise for
empathy and understanding between a married couple. Asking one’s counterparts in a chamber
ensemble to try this or try that, followed by sharing the thought process (self-disclosure), is most
certainly a role-play of sorts, and one which yields empathy, emotional understanding, and
ideally a deeper connection to the music itself on an individual level. Therefore, I feel it is
imperative for students in chamber music settings to discuss and disclose the reasons behind their
musical decisions, particularly those that go beyond the markings and notes of the composer.
Sharing the creative process with their peers, as they might later do with an audience, again lends
an added layer of humanity to the creative act.

I can certainly foresee musicians expressing a counterargument that overanalyzing a
work of art can detract from the perception of spontaneity in performance. They may feel that a
performance unencumbered by analytics comes across as more genuine and less manufactured.
One could go as far as to say that from a philosophical standpoint, spontaneity and creativity
should not be bound by analysis and should perhaps be divorced from it altogether. That
argument extends as far back as Plato’s dialogue Ion, in which Socrates essentially asserts that
Ion’s (a rhapsodist) exceptional recitation of Homer is due not to a complete understanding and
shared experience of all of the characters presented, but is a result of divine inspiration.\textsuperscript{27} I do not intend to somehow prove that an informed performance is superior to one that is based on sheer inspiration, but it certainly makes it difficult for a performer to have a conversation with the audience without knowing how or why they made at least some of their musical decisions.

2. Empathy and Teaching/Learning

Young artists (or young people in general) tend to shy away from taking emotional inventory or analyzing why they feel the way they do, but taking a moment to ask questions and explore can enhance any performer’s profound understanding of a piece of music. An important benefit of the performance conversation is an obvious increase in empathy on several other planes: between the performer and composer, performer and audience, performer and teacher, performer and ensemble, and internally. If music is at all considered a means of communication, then empathy is an essential component of its conveyance. Listener appreciation undoubtedly has a direct correlation with listener understanding. Musicians should also consider the concept of self-empathy. If they are compelled to feel a certain way about a composition or phrase, they should take the time to understand where that emotion has come from. Is it born from a certain memory? A physical sensation? A passing thought?

Empathy is not just a generic concept, it is actually something that can be studied scientifically. Ways in which the brain acquires and processes empathy have been studied in-depth by neuroscientists. Suzanne Keen applies this knowledge in her chapter on “Narrative Empathy,” part of her book, \textit{Toward a Cognitive Theory of Narrative Acts}\textsuperscript{28}. In it she discusses

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{plato} Plato. \textit{Ion}, translation by Benjamin Jowett. \url{http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/ion.html}
\bibitem{suzanne} Suzanne Keen. \textit{Toward a Cognitive Theory of Narrative Acts}, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama (University of Texas Press, 2010), 61-93
\end{thebibliography}
ways in which empathy allows authors to convey clearer imagery, character understanding, internal dialog, and more. Reading comprehension itself hinges on empathy; but on a higher level, emotional intelligence is heightened by the author’s ability to invite empathy.

Novelists themselves often vouch for the centrality of empathy to novel reading and writing, and express belief in narrative empathy’s power to change the minds and lives of readers. This belief mirrors their experiences as ready empathizers. Yet even the most fervent employers of their empathetic imaginations realize that this key ingredient of fictional worldmaking does not always transmit to readers without interference. (p. 71)

I appreciate this passage because I feel that it highlights my contention that speaking to an audience invites empathy and creative understanding. However, Keen goes on to point out that narrative empathy can also be rejected by the reader if it does not align with his/her beliefs. This is not unlike the imposition of a story to a piece of “sad” music that does not align with the listener’s internal imagery. The performer runs the risk of convoluting the listener experience rather than enlightening it.

3. Verbalization and Comprehension

Many instrumentalists have been in private lessons in which the instructor asks the student to sing a line or phrase and then replicate the inflections and dynamics on the instrument. If that sort of oral representation of the notes on the page is an effective means of processing interpretation, then perhaps it is possible that speaking about what you are doing is also a legitimate means of grasping and processing the music on a higher level. An interesting study published in 1986 by Reading Research Quarterly29 discusses the differences in cognitive

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processing between oral and silent reading comprehension. Because I often argue that the performance conversation (whether silent or aloud) is an important aspect of the musician forming a unique interpretation of the music being performed, I thought it would be interesting to take a look at research that may also place value on actual speech and music comprehension over silent, internal discussion.

An obvious observation in this study was that reading times differed between silent and oral reading—oral taking more time. While there were not incredibly substantial differences in levels of comprehension between silent and oral reading, one finding (with some confidence) was that the measured response latency (delay between stimulus and response) when asked questions about the assigned reading did show a slightly longer lag time among those who read silently than those who read aloud. The slower speed actually aided in overall comprehension:

Slower reading rates in oral reading led to faster responses to comprehension items on low- and high-level propositional structures from the text. These results support models of oral and silent reading with common early stages of phonological recoding.

…The present study also points to the importance of two theoretic endeavors: first, extending unitary processing models of reading comprehension to account for temporal differences due to reading mode, and second, viewing comprehension as a structured hierarchy of component levels of meaning and structure rather than as a global process that somehow reveals itself after the reader encounters a printed text. (p. 68)

I have not uncovered a similar study which relates oral reading or vocalization of music notes to musical comprehension, but it is compelling to consider that vocalizing may actually assist with recall through the learning process. I would argue that recall by vocalization applies
not just to the notes, but also to the context (literal, emotive, or otherwise) in which the piece is learned.

I remember an anecdote from a workshop in which percussionist Steve Schick discussed learning a difficult piece of music over a lengthy period of months. While memorizing a particularly challenging passage, he received a phone call which adhered itself to his memory. Each time he approaches that passage in the piece of music, he remembers receiving that phone call. It’s not just an interesting story for an audience to hear, but I would theorize that the verbalization of that story reinforces the cognitive processes undertaken during the learning and interpretation of the music. Much the way a presidential address may conjure a time, place, and image in the mind of the speaker or listener, it is difficult to remove the context of real life from the creative process. Speaking aloud requires a more succinct organization of thoughts, a process which inherently streamlines recall in performance. Much of this has to do with the historical/theoretic level of observation; the musical choices based on cadences, meter, time, and dynamics among other considerations. However, as with the Schick anecdote, speaking can also streamline emotional or narrative recall and allow the performer to more easily access the intrinsic factors that may influence phrasing and other extra-musical factors.

Two of the methods of preparation that I encourage among students preparing to speak are outlining and scripting. Outlining highlights the main “bullet points” the speaker hopes the audience will absorb, and scripting is the word-for-word representation. It is possible that scripting will produce a mechanical result in which the speaker is not thinking much about what is actually being said other than the words on the page. However, reading the script aloud in practice could certainly help the speaker to reduce response latency and gain a clearer understanding of what they are hoping to say and then do musically. Aaron Flagg, Juilliard’s
Associate Director of Jazz Studies, also speaks in a later interview about a similar exercise required of jazz students before speaking in performance. They too are required not only to think about what they will say and why they are saying it. They must also write it out in advance for recitation.

If a goal of practice is to reduce physical and technical hesitation, then I feel it is safe to say that adding the performance conversation (both internal and aloud) can also aid in reducing latency when recalling interpretive decisions.

4. Talking about Music

A self-reflective performer becomes adept at answering “closed questions” about the concrete elements of music (i.e. *What is the key? What is the tempo? Where do modulations occur? Are the phrases irregular?*), as well as the “open questions” that allow for creative responses. An article by Randall Everett Allsup and Marsha Baxter entitled “Talking about Music: Better Questions? Better Discussions!” provides helpful examples of open and closed questions that a teacher may ask of his/her students, with guided questions and closed questions requiring the most specific response from the students. The open questions allow for narrative or profound response and observation (i.e. *What did you hear? How can we describe what we heard?*). Asking questions of one’s audience—particularly those of the “open” variety—without requiring a spoken response can engage the listener in a way that does not impose the performer’s view, but rather opens a door for the listener to develop his/her own take.

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Lenore Pogonowski’s framework for critical listening in the music classroom\textsuperscript{31} utilizes a similar approach to dialog, which aligns with what I view as critical in the performance conversation. Her framework for critical listening was designed to help students reach beyond their first impulse (“It was good,” or “I liked it.”), and dig deeper through analysis, subjectivity, and creativity (identified as Analytical, Judicial, and Creative). The analytical discussion, which focuses on the building blocks of the music, informs or provides rationale for the student’s first impulse. An example would be “This piece makes me want to run.” The teacher would then ask, “What is happening that makes you want to move quickly?” The teacher is an intuitive listener and interviewer, causing the student to expand the meaning of their initial response or impulse through an analytical justification. Moving forward, the teacher applies the judicial domain to further explore the subjective response, such as “How would you change what you just heard in order to better express the emotions that you have experienced?” This leads to exploration of the creative domain, requiring a more sophisticated thought process and application of their now more carefully considered language. In essence, this last phase of inquiry returns the listener to their original impulse, but with a more enriched and refined bank of thoughts from which to draw.

I am not suggesting that the performance conversation with one’s audience should include the same questions posed by a teacher in an elementary music classroom, but I am suggesting that a similar approach can bring the audience’s understanding of the music to a higher level, further informing their initial impulse. This could be particularly effective in performances of so-labeled new music; those works that are more esoteric, harmonically challenging, or sonically unfamiliar. Consider asking questions of the audience prior to

performance that are intended to guide the listener experience, rather than control it. Open questions following the performance invite the audience to reshape the impulse that was formed during the performance. Then through the performer’s discussion of analytical concepts, the listener’s experience becomes more informed. They gain a more confident ability to interpret the work, as they now have a closer connection to the language of the work. There are undeniable observations on the surface that can shape the listener’s initial impulse and emotional response, but when they have a clearer understanding of the rhythm and nuance, they can begin to experience the work on a more intimate plane.

On a more personal level for the performer, he/she should consider asking these questions internally as well. Performers, like listeners, also tend to react according to an initial impulse rather than making a carefully considered response. Some of this has to do with deadlines, course requirements, competitions, and other factors that force the creative process. It may also have to do with putting technical aspects of a work on a higher plane than the communicative and emotive aspects. A performer with refined and unobstructed technical prowess may have the luxury of being able to “dive in” to a piece of music, abiding by the notes and expressive markings, but negating any sort of inner meaning or exploration.

As a percussionist myself, approaching hard music (much of the music written in the late or post-20th century) is an exceptionally rewarding experience in part because it is very personal. It is difficult for a percussionist to open a work by Morton Feldman and play from start to finish without considering, at the very least, the incredible nuance of the more general components of the work. With similar works it is an equally daunting task to fully understand the concrete structural components. Beyond those two levels of observation, as technique is conquered and notes become voices and phrases, a story can begin to emerge and the performer can begin to
identify with the piece on a much more personal level. The piece has required a considerate journey, like a marathon runner’s spiritual high upon crossing the finish line. This is a journey that I believe can (and should) be put into words.

5. A Connection between Words and Understanding

I both marvel at and am perplexed by music students with the innate ability to open and perform a piece of music without internal conversation. By that, I am referring more specifically to musicians who read the music and play “without thinking,” or without relating to the music in some form or fashion through language. To me it is a skill relatable to a bilingual native English-speaker who is able to speak and understand their secondary language without an internal translation. They understand, react, and respond to a foreign language without a psychological intermediary. Perhaps that is a substantive goal for music students, as such strong emphasis is placed on sight-reading throughout their training. A strong sight reader can open a new piece and just play without preparation and without intellectual encumbrances.

In many ways, interpretation when sight reading comes from entrained and internalized stylistic repetitions. Phrasings that might be “beautiful” are so because the performer has a learned vocabulary of standardized interpretations. Moving beyond sight reading and into rehearsal, standardized interpretations can be more carefully scrutinized and adjusted.

6. Musical Fluency: A Potential Stumbling Block?

Years ago I was heavily engrossed in learning a number of important percussive works that utilized graphic notation. With each score I found a new set of challenges involving technique and rhythmic complexity, as well as simply deciphering the score. My musical training had always been firmly cemented in Western tradition, and I found myself frequently attempting
to translate passages from the composer’s written language to my own. I would take a passage by Morton Feldman, such as his *The King of Denmark*, and count out the timed cells, and the numbers and symbols placed within each, and visualize or sometimes write out a version in standard notation on a five-line staff.

Sometime later, while trying to recall how I translated the middle section of line two, I felt like I was back in high school French class. I couldn’t make sense of the text without first translating it to my native tongue. I started to wonder if my need to translate unorthodox notation, or perhaps graphic scores, was a hindrance to my ability to recall in performance; an extra step that was superfluous to the actual act of performing in front of an audience.

As part of a graduate school assignment, I thought I would find out if other musicians encountered the same encumbrance, and I thought about comparing their process of learning and performing from a graphic score to non-musicians who were not fluent in Western notation. Fortunately I had the perfect “laboratories;” one being the music appreciation class I was teaching to non-music majors at St. John’s University, and the other at Juilliard where I was
surrounded by trained musicians. I used another score with more doodles and instructions as my test. This time it was Globokar’s *?Corporel*.

As I had suspected, the non-musicians seemed to have fewer hesitations and encumbrances when attempting to translate the score to sound. They read the instructions and followed the visual cues as written, and without the need to qualify their response by comparing their interpretation to an alternate translation, and honestly the interpretation was not too far off.

By comparison, the trained musicians were certainly more interested in “getting it right,” and admitted to mentally translating lines and spaces according to range and note duration. They even translated time durations indicated in the score to note values set to suitable tempo marking.

In a sense, non-standard notation requires most musicians to stop and consider the musical and analytical decisions being made at the instrument. It is a process that almost forces the performance conversation to be held. They now have to rationalize how the piece is being performed not only in terms of note accuracy, but also their dynamics, articulations, and sound choices. Their natural fluency in Western notation is no longer of use, and they are now deep into *thinking* music.
Challenging young artists with graphic scores or other forms of unfamiliar musical notation can therefore serve as a tool for educators who want their students to break free from the automatic and less thoughtful interpretations that can come with total fluency. Students should learn to approach every score as its own unique story that requires analysis and reflection, and not just accuracy and automatic interpretation.

V. EMBRACING AND ENHANCING THE SKILL SET

1. Getting to the Point

I have found that students in written and oral assignments frequently have a tendency to provide way too much detail up-front, and have difficulty getting to the point. The same thing often happens with musicians as they speak from the stage. They have a few points they hope to get across to the audience, but cause confusion or disinterest by nervously flooding them with unnecessary information. If the performer intends to describe an element of a piece’s structure, then that should probably be the entry point, with limited ancillary information.

As one of several helpful exercises for the students at The Juilliard School, we host yearly seminars on the “30-second elevator pitch,” a way for students to more succinctly state what it is that they do or want. The last well-attended seminar was guided by one of our top school officials. In the central experiment, students were asked to answer a question in a manner that is direct, but contains enough detail for clarity and piques the interest of the listener. A dance student attending the seminar had recently been a member of an experimental dance and theater company. The “downtown” company incorporates music, contemporary ballet, scripted elements, elaborate costumes, and even burlesque, in an effort to challenge and intrigue new
audiences. The student was asked to stand and tell the audience of her peers about her current activities. She opened by talking about the direction that contemporary ballet has taken over the last several decades, describing a focus on traditional technique applied to non-traditional choreography. She elaborated by explaining the difference between dancing “en pointe” and approaching the stage in socks or bare feet. She discussed the importance of artists crossing genres in order to appeal to more diverse audiences. It was at this point that she was stopped. Over 60 seconds had passed and we had not even heard her name. To put it simply, the student was giving detail before substance.

Another situation in which this problem manifests itself is when an artist is asking for something. Through an extensive grant application and review process at Juilliard, I have read hundreds of funding requests in which the first page of the proposal is flooded with history, concepts, random facts, and generic ideas. Even the project’s “mission” is grandiose and entirely conceptual. In this case, reader is looking for an elevator pitch, not for a manifesto. The applicant wants money to record an album, but spends 800 words talking about the future of concert audiences in the United States before getting to the point.

A 30-second elevator pitch, like speaking from the stage, should not bear the encumbrance of complex jargon and tangential topics. Providing too much ancillary information is like asking an enthusiastic parent how old their toddler is. Before they get to the child’s age, the wallet comes out with a stack of laminated photos and a recitation about the graduate schools the little guy will attend. A performer would be better off adhering to the information that will best inform the listener, rather than fill the allotted time with information that provides little more than distraction.
2. The Elevator Pitch as a Learning Tool

Our internal decisions and processes as performers are complex and would probably be unclear to an observer. Making these personal, critical processes understandable to the layperson typically requires the performer to actually think in reverse. They have to consider the problem or challenge they have already conquered, but then look back on how they actually solved that problem. So much of the end-result of a performance is automatic for the experienced musician, rather than manufactured through hyper-analysis.

This process of thinking backwards in order to clearly articulate the “elevator pitch” to an audience carries with it a number of potential benefits including:

1. It reverses the “auto-pilot” musical decisions and forces the performer to consider multiple interpretive options.
2. It forces the performer to develop a more articulate verbal and musical vocabulary.
3. It requires the performer to consider narrative rather than just mechanics or intrinsic decisions.
4. It gives the performer the succinct ability to invite the audience into the creative process, but without overly shaping the listener experience.

Think about this as a means of exercising a skilled “elevator-pitch mindset.” Within this mindset, creative decisions are not just made, but are also justified succinctly by the performer. This can also be of extreme benefit with regard to communication between teacher and student, with the student receiving good information in a concise format that is easy to digest and apply.
3. Practicing the Elevator Pitch

A simple assignment that I will usually give is to have the students articulate in as few words as possible: “What do you want the audience to remember about what you will say?” The performer will of course need to consider the amount of time allotted for their speech. From there, they list the most important talking points. Scripting can be a great way to organize thoughts and eliminate superfluous commentary, which will usually be a next step, but for now a quick list is generated of as many concepts as come to mind. Once they have their list we stratify, identifying the concepts that they are most committed to, and those they feel will best describe their approach to the performance. Then after practicing their speech allowed, we are able to discuss whether or not they were successful in applying the appropriate weight to each concept.

Ranking the concepts can be interesting. So much of our time as percussionists in preparation for a performance is spent on mechanics of motion. We—particularly those of us who are contemporary music “lifers”—have to practice for hours on end just to be able to execute the subtle motions as well as the acrobatic gestures handed to us by composers. Do audiences really care about the time you spent practicing an interval shift at the marimba? Probably not. That said, the more time a performer spends practicing or considering a particular element does not necessarily make it more important to the audience.

4. Case Study – What does the piece mean to me?

As a musician, the student I refer to here is in the top tier of cellists at The Juilliard School, having been one of a very small group of students selected for one of our most prestigious programs in her year of application. Needless to say, within just two months she had already been invited to perform in a number of gala events, featured concerts, and in various off-campus venues with which Juilliard maintains a collaborative partnership.
Juilliard’s recent curricular review has placed a strong emphasis on writing and speaking as an essential component of every classroom experience, but the student’s diploma program does not require that she take courses outside of the performance realm. She openly admitted that she has never been coached or taught how to address an audience, and that whenever she is asked to do so, is unsure of what to say or how to say it.

The student is also not a native English speaker, but is proficient with the language. She voiced some reluctance about her pronunciation skills, but still draws from a broad vocabulary. In our first meeting, we discussed an upcoming performance as part of a series hosted by a private club in NYC. Juilliard has maintained a partnership with the organization for about eight years and presents four to five concerts per semester at the club. Musicians are chosen through a highly selective process vetted through the Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship, faculty, and the Dean’s office. At this venue, and all other off-site venues, students are required to introduce the works on their program and provide at least some discussion of them.

Our first meeting consisted of a conversation about the program, how it would be ordered, and whether or not pieces could or should be replaced (for reasons of duration, flow, and overall theme). I asked her why she chose the pieces on the program, and I received a response not at all uncommon. She said that they were just pieces in her repertoire, and she liked them. I asked if the pieces shared common characteristics or if there was a through-line that tied the program together. She was uncertain. We then began discussing the pieces individually and talking through the performance conversation worksheet (included at the end of this document). The program consisted of the following: J.S. Bach – Cello Suite in D major; Crumb – Sonata for Solo Cello; Schubert – Sonata in A minor for Arpeggione; Schumann – Fantasy Pieces, Op. 73.
In performance, just after the Bach Cello Suite, she discussed her connection to the work and desire to include one Bach suite in all of her solo recitals. Paraphrased:

To me, Bach is like Shakespeare. When I read Shakespeare, or particularly when I see it performed, the lines have a different attitude from person to person. The lines also take on new meaning for me as my life experience progresses. The heartbreak of Romeo and Juliet has more meaning to someone who has been in love. Bach is always new to me and my interpretation is ever-changing; especially when I play a piece and return to it years later. The way I play it today, and how I feel in this moment; you will probably never hear me play this suite this same way again. I hope you have enjoyed.

Five audience members (including the event’s host) were informally questioned at a dinner following the performance and were asked the following:

- Did the performer’s speaking enhance your overall experience when listening, and if so, in what way?
- Did you find the performance conversation distracting?
- Would you have preferred to just hear the music without the conversation?

All of the respondents replied that the performance conversation enhanced their listening experience. Among the reasons were:

- It provided insight into the performer’s approach to the music and how the very different pieces relate to one another.
- It gave a sense of the performer’s personal narrative or story she found within the pieces, which served as interpretive inspiration.
• It provided historical points of reference and a reason why the pieces are so different.

• It allowed the audience to get to know the performer and her personality. (Most important factor, across the board.)

In this instance, the listener experience is supported by a number of Hewitt’s assertions regarding the importance of communication:

That permanence and communication of expression are essential to a complete conception of art can be discerned by looking within the artistic impulse itself. However much the artist may affect indifference to the public, he creates expecting to be understood. Mere self-expression does not satisfy him; he needs appreciation… Art is not mere inspiration, the transient expression of private moods, but a work of communication, meant to endure.32

I am frequently surprised by the lack of conversation that is taking place about the music. Perhaps it has to do with the sheer volume of repertoire the conservatory students are attempting to master within a short period of time. When they are asked why they make certain musical decisions, they either don’t know, or just can’t explain. Digging a little deeper with conversation gives them a reason, an anchor, and a point of reference and reflection; not to mention the fact that it gives them more to share with the audience and a way to connect on a deeper level through conversation before, during, and after the performance.

5. Case Study – Workshop

Applying the four levels of observation to a workshop setting also proves to be an invaluable tool, as each bears concepts applicable to varied experience levels of those in attendance. In some instances in which workshop participants are established musicians, a thorough explanation of general or foundational aspects of a piece of music may be most beneficial. Such general observations include physical technique, sound manipulation, practice methods, and other aspects familiar to a musician, whereas in the midst of a more diverse population, the focus may lean more toward historical, narrative, and perhaps profound levels of observation.

An example that comes to mind is a workshop I was asked to produce in collaboration with faculty members from the Cantorial Studies program at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and students and faculty from The Juilliard School. The workshop would explore classical compositions uniquely arranged for string quintet, based on both liturgical and secular Jewish melodies and texts. As the initial facilitator, I worked with faculty members from both sides to establish a list of learning objectives to be covered throughout the course of this three-hour workshop, to be attended by music students from Juilliard and cantorial students from JTS. The initial objectives were as follows:

1. Provide an overview of the musical arranging process.
2. Address issues of ornamentation, pronunciation, and articulation when converting vocal lines to instrumental.
3. Discuss the ways in which liturgical and secular themes are reflected within the classical works being performed.
4. Explore the texts and melodic themes upon which the compositions were based.
5. Emphasize the overarching concept of “music as an instrument of spirituality.”

An outlined and timed lesson plan was then generated with these objectives in mind. All four levels of observation were present among the stated learning objectives, making it relatively easy to generate questions/prompts for the musicians and attendees. The greatest emphasis of the workshop (i.e. “overarching”) was the profound level of observation, particularly the idea of spirituality and its importance in both liturgical and secular performance. When working through the outline with a group of students, I found it particularly interesting that there was a tremendous variance in each person’s interpretation of the meaning of “spirituality.” Additionally, there was something of a split between audience members who felt that an understanding of music on a spiritual level was less important than a mastery of technique, and that the general and concrete elements were the most important. Some argued the performer’s goal should be to elicit a spiritual experience from the audience, but should do so through perfect technical execution, informed by tradition. Others argued that spirituality must be deeply and personally understood and conveyed by the performer in order for it to effectively resonate among the listeners. This inherently led to a more targeted discussion of the foundational and profound levels of observation.

1. What are the aspects of technique in cantorial and classical music that require the most practice/preparation?

2. Does your technique have a significant impact on your interpretation, or is it the other way around?

3. Is your interpretation informed more by technique or spirituality?

4. What are the benefits of exploring spirituality as a means of informing your interpretation?
5. Are there any detriments to exploring spirituality in music performance?

6. What are some ways a performer can emote, or convey spirituality in performance?

Over the course of the workshop, the general and profound levels of observation really opened a unique and expansive discussion of the impact of technique on spirituality, and vice versa. The goal of this workshop was not necessarily for the attendees to come to a firm conclusion, but rather to promote the sort of dialog that deepened the audience’s appreciation for the music itself.

6. Questions Asked

In another professional role of mine, I teach a survey of contemporary art and music at St. John’s University. An exercise I have used with students in this course is to present them with a work of visual art, performance art, dance, or music, and ask for their responses to the work in the form of a question. I find that it requires the student to think more deeply about the piece, and they tend to dig deeper into the artist or performer’s intent, rather than state their own observations. Why is this piece considered to be ‘groundbreaking’ (in response to Barnett Newman)? What materials were used (in response to Jasper Johns)? How is that sound being created (in response to John Cage)? Why does it seem so terrifying (in response to Krysztof Penderecki)?

I find the exercise extremely beneficial as an educator, because in an arts survey or “appreciation” course, my goal is not only to educate. I also view myself as a responsible ambassador of the works. I want to make sure the students have an understanding of art on a level that is accessible and meaningful to them, not just solely a regurgitation of facts and context that I find interesting or important. I find it important to reinforce the notion that the observer’s response is as important as the work itself.
I have applied the same exercise for musicians as they prepare to speak from the stage. I ask them to consider the questions an audience may have after a performance (particularly of a contemporary or less-accessible work); not just an inexperienced audience, but also those who are aficionados as well. Some may be interested in those foundational issues of sound creation and sonic implements, while others may be more attuned to interpretation or narrative. To take the exercise a step further I suggest that, in preparation for performance, they perform for and ask a variety of listeners what questions have arisen during their performance. The next case study shows a variation of this technique.

7. Case Study – The Outsider’s Perspective

In 2010, I began assigning a specific exercise to my art appreciation students when making an out-of-class visit to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I ask that they find a work of art that intrigues them, or one that they find personally compelling. I then ask that they develop a response to the work, instructing them to take notes on what makes the work special to them. As a next step, I tell them to find another observer (someone they don’t know), and ask that observer what they think about the work. Then I ask that they categorize the observer’s response into the areas of observation that they have been exposed to (foundational, concrete, narrative, and profound). The students are also required to ask the observer if they have any questions about the work itself.

Upon returning to the classroom, personal observations are shared alongside questions and observations from their selected “stranger.” While some students found that their responses to the works were similar to others present, the majority were surprised to find that their observations and personal questions about the work were quite different from those of others. This is a basic lesson in perception and subjectivity. One person’s reaction may be completely
different from another’s, but the wonderful point is that hearing the reaction of another person to a work of art has the power to shape our own perspective.

I was working with a duo of marimbists in 2011, in preparation for a showcase performance at Juiliard (a promotional event for the “Hire Juilliard Performers” program). They were asked prior to the performance to introduce the work, *Nagoya Marimbas* by Steve Reich, before playing. The work is tonal, minimalist in nature, and with a continuous rhythmic intensity and overlap. The students were asked to demonstrate their introduction, which came out something like, “This is *Nagoya Marimbas* by Steve Reich. It’s a minimalist work; so very repetitive, and there are very few dynamic changes. The work is tonal, so it is pleasing to the ear. *I hope you all enjoy.*” I was unimpressed.

I have an intimate knowledge of the work, having performed it a number of times. One of the things I find in works by Steve Reich is a subtle and beautiful complexity that emerges from overlapping rhythmic patterns, and the ways in which colors and dynamics develop organically even without the performers’ interpretive interference. I found it very interesting that the students simply viewed the piece as straightforward, repetitive, and with little dynamic contrast. Rather than impose my own opinion, I gave them my art appreciation students’ assignment. They were to perform the piece for a listener who had never heard it before, request their response to the work, and ask if the listener had any questions. Fortunately I had a colleague close at hand who had never heard the work and was not a musician herself.

After the assignment the students had an invigorated perspective. They didn’t realize that the listener heard such complex rhythms in combination with lush harmonies and dark emotions. They said the interaction with their listener may even change their interpretation of the work in
certain sections. Most assuredly, they would alter the way in which they introduce the piece to an audience of new listeners.

In round two of their demo, one recited, “*Nagoya Marimbas, by Steve Reich, is a work for two marimbas in which the patterns and rhythms from the combined efforts of each performer. They start off simple, begin to overlap and create unique colors and levels of intensity. I think you will hear the music gradually enter, mix, even fight or argue in the middle, and ultimately fade away like a dream. However, what you hear comes more from the notes on the page, and less from us making dramatic gestures and big dynamic changes. That’s one of the things that makes Steve Reich’s music unique and interesting. Please enjoy.*”

It wasn’t the most eloquent speech, but it gave a much more intimate look into the foundational and concrete elements such as volume and patterns, provided a simple narrative for the listener to follow, and gave insight into the performers’ approach to the work. It was a lot of information in a short and simple package, much like the work itself. The exercise required the students to think about their audience’s response, without overthinking their interpretation.

**8. Thinking and Overthinking**

Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power of Now* teaches us to release “thought” from our entrained notion of consciousness. While I struggle with the idea of separating “thought” from the “mind,” I can identify with the assertion that the artist often struggles with mental processes that oversaturate kinetic ability. Tolle seeks the “gap,” defined as the point at which one realizes the oversaturation of the mind has occurred. I think of it as the mind’s third person, who takes a step back and says “You’re doing it wrong.”
As I write this paragraph, I’m watching Charlotte Griffin (a Juilliard alumna, now a professor at UC Irvine) teach a beginner-level dance class to a group of middle and high school students on-site in the Cayman Islands. The initial exercises are posed as a warm-up. The lingo she uses is “and now we’re going to warm up before we begin.” The warm-up begins with simple and isolated movement, muscles and wellness in mind, but within a couple of minutes progresses to a complex and rapid succession of motions and counts. The students, despite the fact that they have never attempted this succession of movements, adapt quickly and execute comfortably. As they move to the first lesson component, an eight-count phrase, it is introduced as a substantive component of the lesson; no longer a simple warm-up. The sequence is actually less challenging both physically and rhythmically than the warm-up, but now that the mental paradigm has shifted from the kinetic-automatic to kinetic with more concentration, thought has oversaturated the conscious mind.

While I firmly understand the logic behind a physical warm-up to precede the new and challenging content, I notice a common hitch between this and my own routine at the marimba. An uninhibited approach to the music seldom has anything to do with a real-time concentration on technique, numerical repetition, or oversaturation of thought. An unsaturated mind is more easily achieved through a warm-up mentality; and through the sensation of doing what you know, not what you are hoping to achieve. Locating Tolle’s “gap” can be practiced through a faster and faster recognition of when too much thought has begun to impede the conscious mind, and stifle the natural and comfortable flow of the automatic.

While the goal of lengthening the space between oversaturated mental moments is ideal in the performance state, recognition of these thought impediments can help us to identify and analyze our interpretation of the various levels of observation. Tolle’s sort of “inverted thought,”
which forces us to *consider what we are considering* is more than just a way to eliminate mental and physical inhibition, but also a way to record what notions we are applying to phrases, dynamics, and physicality. We can be more selective in determining whether or not our thoughts align with our intentions.

A day later, I’m observing an afternoon class of young level-two dancers at a dance studio in a workshop with Natrea Blake (another alumna, experienced teacher, and choreographer). I just saw her run a class in the morning of level-one dancers, ages 6 and 7. To make a long story short, the content between the two classes was the same, but those without entrained inhibitions (the less experienced group) absorbed the content faster, had fewer questions, and achieved more. Thought oversaturation is an entrained state that musicians should strive to overcome as a part of their progress from practice to performance.

When I tell musicians and listeners that there is a process through which to travel in order to get to the profound, they often presuppose that I mean you have to *think* more. There is something intrinsic and honest about a subconscious interpretation. A performer might make note errors and physical mistakes, but hopefully they have intentionally navigated through their interpretive decisions in practice enough to find a flow, fluidity, and artistic ecstasy of the gap.

9. Making Connections and Having Conversations

While I generally encourage students to acquire outside opinions and perspectives, I found that especially relevant to my own thesis and the various lines of discussion presented in this document. Although many educators have different ideas and opinions about the role that the performance conversation should have in the development of music students, I was interested in exploring some commonalities, and also extrapolating some thoughts and exercises from
colleagues. Rather than quantify this information into some sort of flow chart or itemized list of comparisons and contrasts, I decided to shape each conversation in a way that it could stand alone without judgment or pretense. I was thrilled to find that numerous colleagues felt similarly about the importance of public speaking, but also that each of them had a different perspective on its application, development, and use. Through these informal discussions I gathered some unique insights into a number of different and interesting processes for preparation, educational philosophies, and opinions regarding the use of public speaking as a tool for achieving anything from musical excellence to career advancement.

After discussing flow and artistic ecstasy, I thought it most appropriate to hear from Rodney Jones, an artist and teacher who is especially interested in challenging students to consider why it is they do what they do, and to be able to clearly articulate their reasoning. This enlightening conversation lead to several other interviews with other colleagues of different backgrounds and areas of expertise.

VI. SHARING PERSPECTIVES

1. Interview – Rodney Jones

I recalled that prior to a Juilliard Jazz residency at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 2013, that Rodney Jones, the faculty mentor and ensemble leader, was very intentional about preparing the students in the group for speaking from the stage. The residency consisted of two concerts and an afternoon workshop in which all of the students were expected to take an active role in audience communication. I took the opportunity a while later to speak to Mr. Jones about
the residency and why he feels, philosophically, that speaking to the audience—the performance
conversation—is an important part of a music student’s training.

**Why was it important to you to have the musicians to speak from the stage? Why do you
feel this is an important skill?**

“There are two primary aspects to that question as I see it. The first has to do with
*art* and the second has to do with *craft*. Musicians generally tend to excel at art. They
tend to give themselves to their art, to be very focused on what they’re doing, to spend
long hours in the practice room, to exclude social contact in lieu of practicing and
listening. The ability to communicate their art to others is something different, and
involves craft and the knowledge of how to speak clearly; how to create an outline; how
to draw parallels and examples from your own personal experience to bridge to another
person’s personal experience; because often, without that bridge, you may have someone
who is in awe of your art, but may not understand it or fully appreciate it. So, this is the
beginning of educating the audience. I tell my students that an artist who is performing a
work, who doesn’t know the purpose of it – the impulse that the composer had; the need
behind it – is akin to a great actor acting in a play who has no idea what the play is about.
Now, you put a great actor on a stage reading lines; they can read the lines beautifully.
Their diction is perfect. They are able to enunciate clearly and to project to the audience,
and yet if they don’t know what the play is about, there is a dimension and an element
that is missing from their presentation that they can’t share with the audience. They can’t
present the bigger piece, and they can’t say to the audience ‘this is what the art means,
and this is what this art means to *me*.’ What art is to you and what it is to the audience are
two different things. I think it’s important for students to become well-versed in the initial intention of the art they’re doing, whether it’s their own work or others’; to have a sense of ‘this is something I’m presenting for this purpose.’ Now, with JTS, the goal was clear and defined by myself: to describe the sacred power of jazz. Basically, in order to convey the deeper aspects of an artistic work, you have to be versed in those deeper aspects. That includes the purpose of the composition, the intention behind it, and the social context in which it was written. I always ask myself these questions, and encourage my students to do the same:

- **What would best serve the audience?**
- **Who am I speaking to or playing to?**
- **What is it they want to hear from me?**
- **What of my personal experience can I bring to this performance to create a dynamic that will engage the audience?**
- **How do I convey the overall intention?**
- **What will the audience take away from the performance?**

Artists must do the personal work. In order to perform the music at your highest level, you must know the music at its highest level.”

Is it important to you that the students have this conversation with themselves? Should they work on this before making their way to the stage? What should they consider?

“There are infinite things to know. It’s not just knowledge that defines us or our presentation, it’s what we value. You could know a million things, but the things you value are what you are going to convey. So each artist has to look at the accumulated body of both life experience and their educational study. **What are the things that I have**
learned that make a difference in my life? That is the start of what you convey to the audience. If it means something to you, then you have the chance to make it mean something to someone else. Otherwise, it’s like selling someone a product you don’t use.”

**What are some things you do to prepare for public speaking? What do you pass on to the students?**

“They were fortunate that my father was a world-class orator; a minister for 60 years, a college professor for 50 years, five Ph.D.’s, extremely articulate to the nth degree. He always challenged my vocabulary and intellect to the point of recognizing that I had to stretch. He never stretched me. He educated me enough to inspire me to take myself to the next step. That’s a lesson that has stuck with me in terms of mentorship.

The difference between someone who is a master musician or a master orator or master teacher is that a teacher generally shares what they know. A master teacher is able to awaken and inspire you. Each person has their own story. I provide a much greater service if I help you tell your story than if I just tell you my story.”

“In terms of speaking, I always, number one, over-prepare. The reason I over-prepare is that it gives me choices in real time. If I have an hour of speech to prepare, I will prepare three hours-worth of information. The reason for that is in real time I may look at a piece of paper and say, ‘based on who is here today, these three things are better to emphasize than these three.’ If I have those things before me, I can make that choice. If I don’t, then I have to stick to the lone narrative, so it’s a much more limited perspective.

The secret of how I over-prepare is that I prepare as though I’ll be speaking to a wide range of people of different backgrounds and abilities. Therefore I’m speaking to
the very advanced as well as the lowest-level. As Albert Einstein said, ‘if you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it yourself.’ So I think about how I can explain the most advanced musical concepts that I want to share. How can I explain this simply enough that someone’s 80-year-old grandmother can benefit? If I can’t do that, then I haven’t succeeded.

So, I over-prepare, I ask myself, ‘who is the audience?’ I’ll write a draft with all of my ideas. Then I coalesce into sub-topics; the primary ideas, and then I begin to put those in order around the primary objective. So whatever the point of the presentation is, I figure out how to make these fit. Usually there is a natural progression or order that is revealed. I do really consider the audience first to determine what their needs are. That’s how I truly prepare first, is to say ‘who am I speaking to?’ Often just asking that question is enough.

The presentation at the Jewish Theological Seminary; the first thing I did was to go online and learn as much as I could about the place. I knew the neighborhood because I grew up there, but what are the programs they offer? What is the Cantorial Studies program? What do they study? There is an amazing amount of information available to provide you with some intuitive insight. Things come up later (during the presentation) that you knew from your research. It’s like meeting someone and shaking their hand; it’s easy to forget their name. But if you learn something about them at that time, you’ll remember them. I tend to remember my research so that I can access it in real time.

I’m always interested in making it personal to the audience, and giving them something that is actionable. ‘Here is the information, and here is what you can do with it. Here is how you can apply and use it.’ Otherwise it’s an exercise in, ‘I shared this and
it’s not of use to you.’ I think people nowadays, if they are going to offer you their attention for an hour, you ought to give them something of value. It’s the same thing as if you pay money for a good meal, you want it to be of good quality and to have good service.

To make a long story longer, I write down my free-form ideas, then I refine them, then I coalesce that around my main objectives for the talk and look at how to bridge those in a way that is easy to understand—from the most advanced to the beginner—and then I begin to tell the story.

I think stories are a critical part of presentation. People remember stories and they remember the points of stories much more than they do just dialog. So I think it’s important to illustrate; to have two or three key stories. Someone could say, ‘I’m at Juilliard and I study this and that,’ versus someone who says ‘When I came to Juilliard, I remember my first class and so on…’ People can see it more clearly. Our minds; we hear and see everything visually. We are visual thinkers, so if a story is a good story that has a point to it, you draw people in and they remember the story and apply their own story.

With all of that; simplify, simplify, simplify. Tell them what I’m going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what I told them.”

**Comparing jazz to classical musicians, do you feel jazz musicians have a more clear or personal message to convey? Are they more personal because of their skills as improvisers?**

“I understand your perspective as a classical musician, but from my perspective I find jazz musicians to be highly illiterate. The degree of awareness—particularly of the students—is lacking. It’s one thing to know what to do, and another to know why to do. Some of the students haven’t done enough work with themselves to know why. If you
keep digging back, they don’t really know why. ‘Yeah, it feels this way or that way or
good or bad.’ Is that it? Drugs feel good too. I get that the motivation is comfort-driven.
‘Well, I’m sharing with the audience.’ Well again, what are you sharing? I tend to be a
big fan of not being afraid to ask these questions of myself, and when things come up
from the recesses of our consciousness I allow them. Now, many jazz musicians play
with passion and great intention, and offer their heart and soul and what it is that they
feel. I think that’s great, but I don’t think that they necessarily bring that into a conscious
light. If you’re giving a presentation, it’s a significant advantage to be able to know and
express in words why you’re doing what you’re doing, as opposed to just ‘it feels good,’
or ‘here’s the history behind it,’ or ‘I really like this.’ Is there something deeper than that?

This is why I admire John Coltrane so much; overcoming drug addiction, his own
spiritual journey… And I don’t think everyone has to express the same spiritual journey,
but I think there is a significant benefit in personal inquiry; in knowing the deepest you
that you can, and knowing the motivation. Then you can offer that.

I ask many professional musicians and students ‘Why do you do what you do?’
They don’t know. At Juilliard, for example, there are hundreds of courses about how to
play everything, and not one about why to play.”

Is there a connection between being a good improviser or composer and being a good
public speaker?

“I take a step back and think to myself, ‘If I were in the audience, what would I
want to hear?’ I get a different result than if I just say to myself, ‘What do I want to say?’
One is ‘me, me, me,’ and the other is a different perspective. When I think about what I
would want to hear, there is a nurturing aspect to that process. I also ask myself when I’m
giving a talk, ‘Would I want to hear this if I was in the audience? Is this something that
would resonate with me?’ If I can’t say yes, then I need to retool that until I can. I do the
same thing when composing. When I write a piece of music I write it from the standpoint
of the listener. I write it from the standpoint of, ‘How do I feel when I listen to this music,
and how do I expect them to feel?’ Not just, ‘What do I want to say?’”

**How important is it that the audience get to know the musician through speaking? Does public speaking have a positive impact on the experience? Can it be a distraction?**

“I often tell the students that almost no one cares if you play a perfect B-flat scale. Your friends don’t really care; they’re interested in their own practice. Most people aren’t interested. The illusion that it matters to anyone else; ‘it matters to the starfish.’ I tell this story to my students. There was a young boy who went out to the beach and saw thousands of starfish drying out in the sun and there was an old man taking them and throwing them back into the water one at a time. The boy said to the old man, ‘There are 10,000 starfish here, what you’re doing doesn’t matter.’ The old man picked up one and said, ‘It matters to this starfish.’

There are thousands of saxophone players, hundreds of people that play as well as you. Why am I hearing you? What is it about your story? The ability to tell a story matters. It makes the audience care about you. If they don’t care about you the music won’t be as meaningful. If you say, ‘This song is important to me, because it was all that could sustain me when my father died.’ We’ve all experienced loss of some kind. Now people can relate. They are listening to the music through a different lens. When you can connect the music to your own life experience, it gives people the ability to connect it with their life experience. There are a million of these experiences that we can highlight
to make a connection. If you tell your story in a way that others can see their own story in you, and they can be inspired, moved, drawn-in, or sent on a journey of inquiry, I think you have succeeded.

The nuts-and-bolts of music; sure, a few people in the audience are going to enjoy that. Out of a hundred people, five really enjoyed that. ‘I’m using the minor, flat-six for this instead of, whatever. Different tonalities do this and that…’ Some people want to hear that. My mother isn’t interested in that. My wife isn’t interested in that. But to say, ‘I voice the chord in this way because I feel it tugging on my heart. It reminds me of my mother,’ now it’s deeper. Same topic, but I think if you balance it in a way that appeals to the broader audience. If you’re doing a master class at Juilliard, you know the audience and your approach to content will be different than at the Jewish Theological Seminary, or at a jazz club.”

What are some ways that a teacher can help their student get to a more profound and personal understanding of the music they are playing? What techniques might you use to help a student push beyond thinking about just the technical elements of performance?

“My own bias/assumption in jazz is that many people who teach are frustrated performers. They don’t teach because they have a burning passion or desire to teach. They teach when they’re not on the road giving concerts. They’re not composing actively. They don’t have the opportunities to do those things all the time, so they see teaching as a way to earn income. They may enjoy it or feel they are doing something worthwhile, and it just makes them feel better about not performing. If they were able to perform all the time, I doubt they would be sitting before a student saying, ‘Let’s hear that snare drum note again.’ There are not an unlimited number of places to perform;
hence, artists are left with the dilemma of having this creative impulse with nowhere to channel it. For many, teaching is a logical step.

There is a big difference when a teacher—from the beginning—their intention is to be a teacher, versus one who sees himself as a performer first. I’m not necessarily saying that one is lesser than the other. I just think they are different. I always considered myself, even at 16 or 17, to be a teacher who could play. I never considered myself a player who could teach. This was of course because my mother was a teacher, my father was a teacher, my sister taught; I thought teaching was the thing I wanted to do. I love music and I love playing, but I always thought of myself as a teacher who could play rather than player who could teach.

Many of those who are players first, are less familiar with pedagogy or real method approaches to teaching; some who just think they have a lock on that information because they can play. For many, they’re trying to call on their own life experience and directly apply it to the student. For Joe Morello, hearing you play a note just right might be important to him, but his method may not be right for you at this moment. What I’m working on with the guitar today would be of no value to my students if I were to go to them and say, ‘hey guys, this is what we’re working on today,’ when they really need to be working on something else. I think many teachers don’t separate that out, particularly in jazz; some are just making it up as they go along, according to their own experience.”

Do you tend to get more out of your students in lessons through conversation rather than them playing and you providing feedback?

“Again, I’m all about meeting the needs of the student. There are some students who need 80% craft and 20% art, and there are other students who are very technically
advanced who need 80% art and 20% craft. For the advanced students; we may work on the nuance of one note, and what they are trying to say (because they can already play a thousand notes with good technique). My objective is to serve the needs of the student. I do have a common body of information about developing technique. Artistically, the technique doesn’t always matter.

There are a lot of famous musicians who may not have great technique, but they are such great communicators that their lack of technique doesn’t obstruct the message. There is so much conviction. Mick Jagger; he’s trying to tell a story with the voice that he has, and is extremely successful. Someone like Joni Mitchell, who is a great singer, it’s not all about that. You can’t take away the message and presentation of her songs and just hear the voice. If you just want the voice, there are plenty of great technical singers who don’t have the message.

I think I always think about what I can offer my students that they can’t get anywhere else. Anyone can teach a B-flat scale. I do teach that, but it’s not what I value. I think about what is unique about my perspective that I can provide for them. Who has done all of the things that I have done, and also has an interest in the bigger picture? Part of being a great mentor is to offer that piece of yourself that has the deepest truth you can give from your own life experience. They’re not going to hear Rodney Jones’s story from anyone but me. This is not at the expense of never getting to the music and just talking; but, a person who can type 100 words per minute isn’t necessarily a great author. I would rather work with that person who can type 15 words a minute and produce something great.”
During your concert at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and during the preceding workshop, it seemed as though the conversation with the audience continued well into the music. Is there a method or wisdom that you impart on the students to enable them to fluidly convey their ideas and connect them seamlessly with the music itself?

“When you really care about the students and your audience; I care about their future about as much as they do. The greatest things you can pick up are things that are *caught* but not taught. If you’re around someone who is authentic and committed and sincere, who is sharing with love, you can catch that. You benefit more than someone who just teaches.

When I spoke to the audience, what I was saying to them really mattered to me. I wasn’t doing it for money, for Juilliard, for someone else. I speak to the audience about who I am. You have to give of yourself to both the audience and to your students.

The gifts that are offered through mentorship by providing an example, things that are caught (not taught) are transformative to the student. I know that those incidental lessons are important and are things that they really remember. Much like the audience, the bottom line is they are going to remember who I was, but not necessarily the details of everything I put on stage.”

I asked Mr. Jones what other resources he thought could be used by students to hone their communication skills, and expressing their ideas beyond just the performance aspect. He suggested that students interested in perfecting this skill should be aware of works by skilled speakers and motivators like Wayne Dyer, Brian Tracy, Tony Robbins, Leo Buscaglia, and Dale Carnegie. They should get out and see people who are skilled at the art of audience
communication. They should take note of what they see and apply their own personality to the techniques that they absorb.

From my conversation with Mr. Jones, there are several themes that seemed to emerge. First of all, audience communication is an important, if not essential skill for young musicians to hone. Being able to verbally express one’s own personal attachment to a work can have a very positive impact on the listener experience. Just as the performer should be an expert at communicating with the audience, the same should be applied to the teacher-student relationship. The musician (and the teacher) should not just be a demonstrator or an extension of the instrument. The musician must communicate. To just assume that an audience will draw deep conclusions, profound understanding, and a real appreciation for the music just by hearing it, is surrendering an opportunity to shape the listener experience in a way that would enhance the performance. Mr. Jones assertion, as is mine, is that the audience does not attend a performance just to hear someone play. They attend to get to know that person as well; to hear a unique perspective; and to have a heightened experience—something beyond what they would hear by listening to a CD.

2. Interview – Michael Shinn

After an influential and inspirational visit with Rodney Jones, I thought it would be interesting to transition to a classical musician who spends a great deal of time in a classroom setting (in addition to work as a performer). Michael Shinn is responsible for teaching a number of core classes at Juilliard, and also serves as a consultant in numerous capacities for the Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship as well as Juilliard Global Ventures. He also currently spearheads Juilliard’s new public speaking initiative, which requires all student musicians to speak from the stage, and be evaluated on that skill, as a required component of
Do you consider public speaking to be an important aspect of a musical performance and why?

“I think it’s an absolutely paramount, crucial element. As performers, we have to be able to connect with the audience. We’re not ‘trained monkeys,’ going up on stage trying to demonstrate how much we’ve practiced our passage-work, and how much we can express through this abstract art. Rather, we need to connect with the audience in a much more humane way and in a multifaceted way. By talking to the audience we can engage with the audience, but we also can educate the audience, and we can make them feel at home and a little more comfortable, in general, with being in a concert hall. You know, most of the time when you play a concert there are going to be people in the audience who have never been to a concert before. It can be an intimidating experience for them. Most people grow up going to rock concerts, pop concerts, or places where there are no rules. You can do whatever you want. You scream and cheer whenever you want, but when you go to a classical music concert there is this aura. There is a beautiful space they’re in, and they don’t know when they’re supposed to applaud, or when they’re supposed to not sneeze or cough. You walk into Stern Auditorium (at Carnegie) and see cough drops. So you want to make sure people feel comfortable and engaged so that they
can be empowered listeners, and informed listeners. So I think that talking can REALLY break down that barrier. It doesn’t have to necessarily be at the beginning of the concert either. I can be in the middle at some point or after the first piece, but somewhere early on in a concert I think it’s crucial for us to engage the audience in that way.”

Do you feel there is any correlation between the ways musicians perform if they choose to speak as a component of the performance or not? If they opt to speak, do you notice a difference between a performance when someone just goes out and plays, versus those who don’t?

“Absolutely. I often talk about different approaches to speaking, dependent on your audience. You can be talking to grade school students in a gym; you can be playing a concert at Carnegie Hall; whatever it is; and we need to think about that. If you have a group that is slightly more musically educated—people coming to the table wanting to add something more to what they already know—when we do our preparation for that talk, so that we can help pave the way for a more musically informed, deeper experience for our listeners; when we think about what we want to say, if it’s something about the structure of the piece, or if it’s something about the theme of the piece, or if it’s something about the character of a piece, and we’re preparing to talk about that, it forces us to think about that theme or that character or the structure of the piece in a way that we might not have otherwise thought about as we prepare the piece. So, I think the exercise of going through and thinking about how you want to present a piece of music is a good one for us anyway in an abstract form, even if you don’t do the talk, because it forces you to pin down exactly what it is that you want to project from a musical perspective.”
So, you would say that preparing to speak from the stage does impact your interpretation or impact your musical decisions?

“Absolutely. I definitely think so. I know for sure it has for me, from a personal perspective. It always does. So, yes. It also opens the floodgates. I use the example of the Liszt Sonata when I talk to students about performing. The Liszt Sonata—great piece; really large, 30 minutes long, typically—for an audience member not accustomed to sitting there for a one-movement, 30 minute long piece; that’s a tough pill to swallow. So what I do, depending on the context, is maybe talk about the transformation of that “diabolical” theme that comes back as a “beautiful, heavenly” second theme. But, what I always talk about is this one descending motive that is very obvious, and whenever that comes back it’s sort of an “aha” moment throughout the piece so you can better understand the structure. I think that also helps listeners tremendously.”

Are there ways in which you have seen or experienced public speaking detracting from a performance, or distracting?

“If it’s poorly done it can detract from the performance. We have to be careful with how we do it. Even the spoke portion of the concert is still part of the performance. It’s a different kind of performance, but it is a performance. It’s just like when you walk into a classroom as a teacher. You’re performing. It’s an art form that we have to understand, whether it’s in the classroom or in front of an audience. Yes, if you do it poorly it can detract. That’s why we’re trying to develop this at our school, with all of the students.”

Yes, and what would you say, from your perspective, is the impetus for Juilliard to decide in 2015 to now require our students to speak as a component of their graduation recitals?
Because we all believe that this is such an important part of their careers, they need to have a training ground for it. If we thrust them out into society after they’ve graduated and say ‘oh, by the way, maybe you should start talking during your concerts,’ they’re going to say ‘ummm, I didn’t get any training in that area.’ So that’s what we’re trying to do. We need to help them while we have them. It’s just like entrepreneurship. We’re concurrently putting together a nice curriculum that will also support them in that area, so that they can walk out knowing more about how the industry works.

They have to practice. They have to see other people do it. They have to consider the basic components of how to give a talk. It’s a whole process that we guide them through.

**What are some of the important things you think that a performer can convey that are most compelling for an audience, and maybe some things you think are less interesting?**

**How do you decide what is more compelling?**

“It depends on a lot of things; first and foremost, on the audience. The absolute first thing we have to think about is, ‘who am I playing for?’ I’m not necessarily going to talk about complicated elements of the Liszt Sonata to second graders. (I probably wouldn’t play the Liszt Sonata for second graders either.) I think the most important thing, regardless of the audience, is the connection that you make so that they see you’re not just that ‘trained monkey,’ you actually have a personality.

I always say that a player’s personality typically comes out in their playing, but it ALWAYS comes out when they speak from the stage. You know everything about that person is the moment they open their mouth. So I think showing that is an important part of the performance process, because there is a bond that immediately forms.
Depending on the audience, I think that sometimes it’s very helpful to talk either about structural aspects of the piece, some sort of character, or thematic idea. Those can be helpful. I think of a recent student’s speech at Convocation (2014), in which he talked about the historical/personal context of a work by Schumann. That’s not always the best approach, but in this case it was because it shed light on the story behind the piece, and what was going on in Schumann’s tumultuous life at that time. I think something like that can be very powerful. Of course, we have to be careful there, because life issues are not necessarily what directly impacts the composer as he is writing the piece. It could be problematic if performers say something that is not totally accurate.

I also think that drawing a personal connection—as to why a performer chose a particular piece, or why a performer chose to design a program in a certain way—can be really powerful. Maybe there is a particular aspect of a piece that is attractive to the performer, and if there is, then perhaps they should show it. If you point out a particular aspect of a piece, then the audience is 100 times more likely to respond the way you want them to.

Now, when we talk about the structure of one’s speech, we tell students to have some sort of an introduction, followed by the main body, and then some sort of concluding statement. I’m careful about the first and last part of that in particular. The middle portion, whatever the content is, we make sure the student is correct. We also look for some sort of personal connection they have to that content. When it comes to things like concluding remarks, we don’t want them to just say ‘thank you all for coming, I hope you enjoyed the concert.’ That’s something we feel can detract from the overall talk. If
you wrap it up with a *mousy* sort of ‘I hope you like it,’ it sounds like you’re just not convinced that the audience is going to enjoy the piece.

I always like to end talks by providing the audience with a task. ‘Listen to this aspect of the piece. Think about how this aspect makes you feel in terms of character or emotion that you think the composer is trying to convey.’ This way they can internalize an action item, even something simple that they can latch on to, as opposed to just saying ‘oh, I hope you like this.’ I think those weak concluding remarks can detract, but when you are prepared and it is done correctly it can be very powerful.”

**For some performers it is helpful, in preparation, to create a sort of narrative to help them understand a piece, or to create a personal relationship to the work. However, I also try to be careful not to impose that narrative onto the listener. What are your feelings with regard to sharing a personal story or narrative with the audience?**

“I actually am a little bit flexible on this. There are some pianists who believe that what is in the score is sacrosanct and we should not do anything to change what is written, as a result I personally feel that the lack of personal touch or connection is noticeable. I think as performers we need to have that ability to see and discuss what is within a piece of music. It’s not just black and white on a page. It’s something that comes to life when we perform, and any composer worth his weight would say you have to do something that is *you*; I don’t want this to be my performance, I want this to be your performance. So expanding that into the talk; we have to be careful of course not to say something that’s just ridiculous. ‘Oh, I think the piece is about this,’ but it’s not at all about that. You want to make sure whatever you say is based in truth.
I think we can offer personal anecdotes about a piece. Perhaps the first time you heard a particular piece, you were inspired because it made you feel a certain way. I think things like that can be good if done appropriately.”

You have seen a number of Juilliard student recitals for which you have also evaluated their public speaking. You have been leading workshops and programs, and various other things. What are some of the common issues that you are seeing with the student performers? What are some of the skills that seem to be lacking?

“...I have seen a lot of things. One of the things that is problematic is the repeated use of things like ‘um,’ or ‘like,’ or ‘you know.’ These are of course a problem and should be avoided. When you use the word “um,” to just fill in a gap, you forget that those spaces, if left alone, could actually be powerful. It could function like a rest in music. Rests can often be more important than the notes. Taking a pause for dramatic effect can be a very useful approach. That’s something I think we need to be comfortable with.

There are also a lot of international students—English is their second language—so there are some pronunciation and grammar issues. That’s something I try to work with them on one-on-one. Of course they can learn and rehearse a speech. It could be short. We’re not requiring these students to give a long speech. Even 30 seconds is better than nothing. As long as they take the time to have someone evaluate and work with them on these issues, then it’s usually not a big problem.”

What are some of the exercises that you do with the students, or what are some things that you encourage them to do on their own when preparing to speak?
“Stand in front of a mirror and do it. Videotaping can also be very useful. It can also help you to notice your physical gestures. A lot of people have come to the sessions with a lot of unusual gestures or stage positions because they might feel comfortable that way. These sorts of things can be problematic, and sometimes the only way to catch them (these nervous ticks), is by videotaping.

I also think it’s important to practice your speech on others.”

**Do you find that performers’ attitudes toward speaking can be polarizing? When I work with alumni especially, they are either totally comfortable or they absolutely hate doing it?**

“I totally agree. You have people who just don’t do it unless required, and you have those who think they are completely comfortable and enjoy it. ‘Of course I do it. I’ve been doing it since I was ten,’ which is me. Then you have people who are adamant that they are just there to perform. Especially here at Juilliard this seems to be the case.”

**As far as faculty or professionals go, do you see that same sort of yes/no with regard to speaking?**

“There is of course the ‘old’ sort of diametric objection that students are here to learn to play and not speak. Do they need to even be in the classroom studying, or should they just be in the practice room? That polarization is fewer and further between. For the most part, I think professionals and faculty are more and more supportive and see this as a necessary thing. That includes speaking in the classroom as well as in performance. I think most savvy performers these days realize that it is an important career skill as well.”

Michael Shinn’s ideas and perspective, based on his experience as both a classroom instructor and an active performer, provide insight both into his approach and his emphasis of the
importance of this skill set. It is clear that he sees the importance of speaking from the stage as a crucial vehicle for the audience’s holistic understanding of the music being performed. Perhaps of equal importance, he expresses a similar view which I espouse; that learning to speak from the stage and preparing to do so accentuates and informs the performer’s interpretation.

Michael believes in these concepts to such a formidable degree that he is an active faculty voice in shaping the music student curriculum at Juilliard. In addition to one-on-one meetings with students, he and his colleagues host small group sessions in which students can practice their public speaking in front of a supportive peer group. He provides feedback that includes concepts, content, and overall presentation. He has also developed an online course with helpful exercises, videos, and other tools to get students to think about these concepts in a way that is practical, low-stress, and clear.

As a career services professional, I appreciate the fact that he too feels that public speaking is an important skill to hone on the path to career opportunities. A solid public speaker connects with audiences and individuals before, during, and after concert performances, building a stronger base of long-term support, and ideally creating permanent advocates for the arts in the process.

3. Interview – Bonnie Slobodien

A variety of educators and industry professionals concur that public speaking is an extremely valuable skill for a performer to hone. Among them is Bonnie Slobodien, Director of Education and Community Engagement for Astral Artists, a non-profit dedicated to advancing the careers of some of the nation’s most gifted young artists, particularly those who are new entries into the profession. Through Astral, they receive management and representation, acquire
performances at some of the country’s premiere venues, and perhaps most importantly, they receive invaluable advice and guidance from the company’s experienced staff and educators. Bonnie is an educator with over 33 years of experience. She works closely with Astral’s artists on public speaking skills, building interactive programs, developing a comfortable and engaging stage presence, and preparing concert presentations for young audiences. She began her career as an instrumental music teacher, later developing instrumental music programs for a number of public and private schools throughout the Northeast. She has worked with Astral for over a decade, bringing their artists into new communities, classrooms, and venues to bridge the gap between classical music and new and diverse audiences.

We met to discuss Bonnie’s approach to working with emerging artists, and ways in which she helps them to understand the intrinsic value of speaking from the stage. With her permission, I documented our conversation.

**Do you consider public speaking to be an important aspect of a musical performance and why?**

“I definitely do! I think in this day and age, there is a relationship that people in the audience want to build with the performer. The performers need to have the skills to be able to do that. It brings the people closer to them and to their music.”

**Do you feel there is any sort of correlation between the way that musicians perform when (should they choose to do so) they speak as a component of their performance?**

“I don’t see any difference in the way that they perform their music. I do see a difference in the way the audience *reacts* to their music. Now, if you’re playing a recital for a very knowledgeable, well-educated music audience—one that goes to concerts...
often—then maybe speaking isn’t very important. They came to hear Chopin, and you’re going to play Chopin, and they already come with a good knowledge of it; or maybe you’re playing contemporary music and they’re very knowledgeable about that, and they just want to hear the music. That’s not primarily the type of audience that our very high-level performers are playing for, and with the loss of music education in schools and the all-consuming ‘pop culture’ surrounding us, people don’t often come to the concert hall with a whole lot of knowledge. The speaking really helps to bring an audience ‘in.’ I don’t think it changes the way the performer performs.”

**Do you feel that public speaking can detract from the performance?**

“The only way it could detract, I suppose, is if the performer speaks too long, or maybe isn’t very interesting. Nine times out of ten, the public speaking enhances the performance. It even can enhance it when you have a highly knowledgeable audience, because the performer can talk a little bit more in-depth, or speak with a higher-level vocabulary. If the audience is of mixed experience, the public speaking can be critically important; especially if the artist wants to play the music that he thinks the audience is going to want to hear. If you are playing for an elderly audience, and you want to play your own music, let’s say, or the music of a contemporary composer. You can’t just throw it at them. You’ve studied it, you’ve learned it, you care about it, and you’re steeped in it. The audience however only gets one shot to hear it. Chances are, if it is a certain kind of audience, they’re not going to be too happy. With a few well-placed comments, you can bring them in and allow them to listen with an open mind. Of course the same is true with young audiences—kids. They often love contemporary music (unusual sounds, unusual rhythms, unexpected things), but if you want to bring them
Mozart you may have to try a little harder. Again, it’s the speaking that will give them something to hold on to. If the performer is a fine speaker—has a little bit of humor—it relaxes the audience who may not be used to this kind of performance. Personality is pretty important.”

**What are some of the more important things that the artist can convey that would be compelling for an audience?**

“Of course it depends on the audience. On one level, if you’re speaking to an audience that has no experience whatsoever, then it’s really about your personality and some of the things you share about yourself, or things that you might be able to give them to listen for. They have something to hold on to, and they also know something about you as a person. If you’re talking to a classical music audience, then you can go more in depth. Talking about the structure of the music could be very important, but also give examples so that they clearly understand what you are saying. I think the biggest thing to remember is that the audience gets to hear this thing one time, and you’ve been living with it and digging into it. Sometimes artists forget that top layer. However, it’s important not to just tell them ‘this is the greatest piece, most beautiful piece ever written,’ or ‘this is my favorite piece.’ Just let the audience figure that out for themselves. If you’re going to say “this is an important piece,” then give them a little context and background. Place the piece within the lineage. Really though, it also depends on how long you have to speak. The artist has to be prepared. Don’t figure out what to say on site. Extemporaneous can be ok if the artist is really experienced; but a lot are really not that good at it. Plan it out.
There is a festival that I know that is really well-known; great artists, great venue. They have a tradition of the artist not speaking. When the performer just comes out and receives applause, plays, and leaves; I see that and I think, ‘Hello? Did you notice that we’re here? Does it matter that we’re here?’ I think when an artist turns around and speaks directly to the audience, it shows that they are grateful. I think it’s respectful to the audience. Nowadays, it’s become more common. Conductors are doing that more; along with pre- and post-concert discussions. They are making it personal and less formal. A lot of this music is serious and requires concentration. If it’s complicated, you have to find a way to let them in.

I had an artist who really believed that the music should just speak for itself, and he wanted to play his own contemporary composition. I frankly explained to him that we want to be invited back to this venue. If you play this music without talking to them about it, they won’t understand it and they’re not going to want us back. You have to know the audience and the venue, of course, but some music really requires that you share something about it or about yourself. He actually chose something to say that I thought was great—very simple—he said ‘this is the first time I’m playing one of my own pieces for an audience, so I want to thank you very much for being here and for giving me the opportunity to play this for you.’ Bingo! He didn’t have to say anything else because the audience felt like they were now a part of his process. They felt that he cared about them. Therefore, they cared about him and the music. It was very effective.”

**Do you feel that speaking from the stage is an important skill for career advancement?**

“Yes, absolutely. Everybody wants to hear from the artist. They want to know who you are and what you’re about. In smaller venues, it’s especially important.”
What are some difficulties that you see working with young artists on this skill set?

“There are some common issues. Maybe English is their second language; maybe they have an accent; they speak too fast or too slow, etc… The ability to play the music and go from playing to speaking; it can be a really difficult thing. They’re so focused on perfection in performance, and on top of that they have to relate to the audience through speaking. Some artists are naturals. You’ll see them at a competition playing a very important piece, and immediately when they come off stage somebody sticks a microphone in their face. That skill; this is another reason why it’s important for career advancement. Some people are relaxed and articulate. Others are scared to death. One of the things we do at Astral is to make speaking an absolute requirement for all performance opportunities. We always send a staff person—usually it’s me—to provide them with critique. They’re not competing for anything. We just want them to be more comfortable in these settings. I’m on their team!”

What are some exercises that you encourage?

“They should videotape themselves or have a trustworthy friend in the audience to take notes and provide feedback. I had an artist who was from another country; and he had an accent, but that wasn’t at all the issue. Whenever he spoke he was looking down the whole time. We had two days together and six performances, so we got to the point near the end when I could be really picky with him. I said ‘you’re fine at this point, but if you want to hear more I have more.’ He was really into it. He said ‘I want to sound like a radio announcer.’ He was really motivated to get better, and he did improve. In this case, as with a lot of performers, the critique wasn’t about his content. It was about his
delivery—speaking slower, more deliberately, not cutting off sentences early, looking up at the audience; those kinds of things.

I don’t really have a lot of exercises set in stone. I’m thinking about getting in touch with some theater people to get some ideas about some more standard things. I have basically set us up so that either I or another member of my team will be there to listen and critique. We have about 160 performances a year, so I’ve also set up a program with various team members who take an evaluation survey with them to the performances. It includes a public speaking section so that they can include that in their evaluation of the performers. We consistently provide that feedback. Often we send them the video of their performance.

Sometimes it’s hard to tell somebody that they are great players, but they’re poor speakers. It’s like telling somebody that you have an issue with how they dress. It can be taken personally. Going to the tape can help illustrate for them directly what you mean.

I also usually work with musicians on a series of performances, so they have the chance to try different things and gradually make changes.”

**Do you find that performers’ attitudes toward speaking can be polarizing? I often feel like they are either comfortable, or they absolutely hate it and don’t want to do it.**

“Well, those who hate it and don’t want to do it; they’re not going to get very far. At Astral it’s just part of what we do. If you’re not interested in speaking, then we’re just not a good fit for you. For chamber groups, I do see that the speaking responsibilities sort of naturally fall to the one or two members who are comfortable. Of course I require that they split it up. Some people don’t hate it, they’re just reticent. You just have to give them the opportunity, because they’re not going to just take it.
I had a scenario in which one of our female performers was just painfully shy. She didn’t even like to have her picture taken. Fabulous musician! I kept forcing the issue about speaking. Eventually I told her to get out there and walk among the audience and speak to them. Breaking that wall seemed to make her more comfortable. She took her instrument with her and headed down the aisle and had her breakthrough. It took a while to get to that point, but after having that positive experience and being more face-to-face with the audience, she started to really love it.”

As I prepared and brainstormed questions for these interviews, I thought it would be important to include a “non-performer” in the mix. Bonnie Slobodien is extremely active in the performing arts, but much more as a mentor, educator, and coach. Anyone with a 30+ year background as an educator is going to have a solid foundation as a communicator, and will also have the ability to expand minds through verbal skills, anecdotes, and exercises. With each answer, it was clear to me that Bonnie had both the unique perspective of an educator, combined with the standpoint of a lifelong audience member. She has experienced the “best of the best,” and the worst, and from both sides of the stage.

An area in which we perhaps disagree slightly is my contention that performers do actually change the way they perform if they choose to consider, prepare, and speak from the stage. She felt as though while the performance itself has no noticeable musical difference, the audience certainly has a reaction that lends merit to the effort. The only caveat is that a boring or unprepared speaker could run the risk of diminishing the integrity and overall presentation of the performance.
Like Michael Shinn, Bonnie’s career commitment to educating artists on the Astral roster in this important area in many ways validates the need for students to do more while they are in school. Astral represents emerging professionals (some of whom are in fact still in school), and by her own admission most receive little or no educational emphasis on public speaking until they enter the “real world” and realize its importance.

4. Interview – Aaron Flagg

Aaron Flagg is Department Chair and Associate Director of Juilliard’s Jazz Division. In addition to a host of administrative and educational tasks he oversees, Flagg is largely responsible for a recent revisiting of the undergraduate and graduate jazz curriculum following a recent transition of leadership. He has been actively researching and finding ways to more efficiently align the jazz curriculum, allowing for a more idiomatic connection from one course to the next as the students progress. As a departmental overseer, I felt it would be useful to get his broader perspective on the learning experience for music students, and possibly get a sense of the role of an upper administrator in shaping that experience.

I have attended dozens of Juilliard jazz performances over the years both on and off campus. Just like professional jazz concerts, I have noticed that most of the performances include public speaking. While it is often “off the cuff,” or less rehearsed, it still tends to provide the audience with a sense or impression of the musicians’ personalities. I was initially curious if this was a part of the culture of jazz across the board, or if this is something that is actually taught to the students or presented as an expectation. This led to my interest in having a longer conversation with Flagg about the role of speaking in performance.
Do you think public speaking is an important aspect of musical training and performance?

“Yes. I think public speaking is a critical aspect for all artists, frankly. I assume the added question is ‘why?’ Well there are a multitude of reasons why; one of which for the artists’ themselves is that it strengthens and deepens the artistic expression, and their artistic vision. Playing a piece; dancing a piece; learning lines for a play; the work involved is intense enough to need that, but sometimes it isn’t even on their minds. ‘Why are we doing this? What is the purpose behind this?’ Well, what did the creator of this work want to transmit? ‘What do I want to add to that transmission?’ It forces yourself to articulate, similar to an artistic statement. It’s a clarifying process.

For an audience, especially in the 21st century—with so many multi-sensory tools; visual, audio, even social media—there is a greater desire for the audience to connect. ‘Who is this, as a person?’ If we think of our political environment we vote for people not only because we support what they stand for or policies they agree with, but also who we like and who we feel connected to, or who we feel might understand us, and what we need and think. Artists, especially in this century and moving forward, it’s not enough just to be a technician. It’s not enough just to execute. In terms of building a brand; in terms of building a connection with the audience; or even in terms of inviting more people into the artform; we have to give them a sense that not only can they feel or hear what the artist is doing, or that the artist is committed. How they speak about it is so impactful. ‘I’m intrigued and want to hear more. I don’t understand this, but I want to.’

So, our ability as artists to be able to frame the experience for the listener in a way that reflects our humanity, as opposed to just an academic or perhaps esoteric exercise, is
critical for audience engagement. I think it’s something we need to take increasingly more seriously.

Another aspect is the democratization of the arts. Before, there were spokespeople on behalf of the arts. The artistic director might have been the only one to speak, or the conductor would be the identity of an orchestra. If you just look at Twitter, Instagram, etc…; everyone has a voice. Your audience wants to know you have a voice and know who you are. Right now there is a greater opportunity, and frankly a greater expectation, for all artists (not just soloists, or entrepreneurs) to be able to explain why it is you do what you do, and why do you love it.

I think it is a critical skill and a critical obligation for institutions to really embrace this skill set. Otherwise we’re doing a disservice to our students.”

Do you feel there is any sort of correlation between the way a student performs if they choose to speak versus not speaking from the stage?

“That depends. Someone could speak because it’s an assignment, so it becomes a burden and they just want to get it over with. Then they skip to what they’re really there for, which is the performance itself. In that case, it tends to be a distraction to the performer, it’s an annoyance to the audience, and it is clearly a perfunctory thing to do. It’s like asking people to turn off their cellphones. Having some sort of emotional engagement with the speaking can contribute to the art making. Otherwise the audience won’t relate other than to think ‘Oh, I understand what it means to do something that I just have to do.’

I think, in terms of actually heightening the musical experience, students need to speak their words with passion. When that is done thoughtfully and with preparation, and
they express what they are actually feeling, that breaks down the fourth wall between the performer and audience. That sets the table. That sets the expectation. The artist has set up and considered the listener experience, which gives them the responsibility and challenge to meet those standards. It’s much like a chef introducing what they have been cooking before you eat. ‘I’ve made this pie with this special sauce, and I hope it is tangy and sweet, so here you go!’ Now, that can also increase the performer’s anxiety or nervousness, but it also raises the excitement level. You want to bring it! You want to execute properly, but also have a human-to-human, emotional connection. Especially in the arts, the techniques have risen to such a high level, it sometimes (believe it or not) gets lost, so articulating the expression keeps others passionately engaged. It ‘sets the table’ for something much more exciting to possibly happen.”

When you are working with students on their public speaking, how to you get them to a place where they no longer sound robotic or clinical, and actually sound like they are being genuine and passionate?

“One way that I have seen this work is to reflect back to the student what you as an audience member are feeling. So, instead of taking the role of the teacher, saying ‘no, you need to use this word or use that word,’ I tend to respond with, ‘Here’s what I feel when you say that. I feel you are thinking about dinner tonight, or you’re disconnected and not thinking about what you’re saying. That makes me curious, but maybe less excited?’ When students hear what you hear, it makes them reconsider whether or not that is the message they are trying to get across. Typically, early on, the answer is no. They want you to feel more excited about the piece, so I express ‘If you want me to feel
that, then you have to make me.’ That often requires reconsideration and reflection as to what they are saying and how they are saying it.

The students in Juilliard Jazz, we explore this skill through inquiry. We often ask why they are playing a certain piece. The question often elicits an answer about some aspect of the piece that they like. It gives us the opportunity to point out whether their musical expression aligns with that, as well as if they are effectively expressing that through speaking.

Speaking from the stage doesn’t have to be pristine and perfect. It could be casual, like an anecdote about the rehearsal process; really anything that personalizes the artist’s experience for the audience that is genuine, I think is good. Since we are all about expression, I don’t think it is out of line to ask the artist to express themselves in written form and verbal form. Not everyone will embrace that in the same way, but I think the challenge is similar to what we are asking audiences to do when they listen to us. We’re asking them to try to make sense of something that they might not be familiar with.”

This sounds similar, perhaps, to the instructor-student relationship, where the teacher might ask why the student made a particular musical decision, and what are you trying to convey. There seems to be a connection between what you are saying about how you show the students what an audience might be gathering, and whether or not that is the intent of the student.

“Yes, and it’s very hard in the classical tradition to embrace this because there is a ritual that is well in place. The process of asking questions of ourselves is to examine why the ritual exists, and what it is for. Is it still relevant and do I believe in it?
In jazz it’s a little different, or at least it is my perception, that jazz audiences don’t expect some sort of recitation. They expect something new, or a personalized (often brand new) work. Even if it’s a well-known piece, there are still going to be some very different interpretations. A real question for the performer is, how are they going to do it differently? I think *personality* is expected in jazz. They are expected to be unique and different and to have a point of view, but students still aren’t used to articulating that in verbal form. There is a deep transition for them that has to happen. They need to understand that their audience wants to know more than just a ‘theory lesson,’ they want to know what the artist is hearing. ‘How is what you are doing different from someone else?’ That’s difficult for some jazz artists who just do what they do without really thinking about it. We teach that they don’t just ‘do what they do,’ rather they work inside of certain constructs. If you don’t embrace the responsibility of learning about those constructs, then you will have less to offer your audience. If you can give them context, or give them some information, you set the table and give them confidence and understanding. They know not only how to listen, but they also have an appreciation for the thoughtful way the musician has prepared (not just casually prepared).

Now, in jazz, there is a pretty casual ‘vibe’ or image, but I think people forget that historically happened because performers were playing directly from their experiences that were directly relatable to the people sitting in front of them. They would play a blues because everyone understood the blues. It’s not the same anymore. You can’t assume the audience understands the music, and should offer some context.”

**What are some of the verbal “clichés” that you hear out there? Are there things you want to train out of the students?**
“That’s funny. I think in the classical tradition there is that ritual, and usually there isn’t much that is said anyway. There are institutional items like thanking donors or sponsors. Often there is nothing said about the music. Sometimes even the ‘cliché’ has some sincerity. It’s a moment of human exchange. It’s not so cliché if it comes across as sincere. With our students, the issue would be the cliché along with a lack of any specificity. They don’t announce or introduce the tunes or express any emotion, or they have not thought about the set list. Humor, light-heartedness, being casual; it’s not valuable if there is no sincerity. There is no human connection. Even if it’s short and sincere; ‘I put together this program from my favorite Miles Davis record, the first one I heard, and it inspired me, so that’s why I’ve chosen these tunes. I’m going to do something different/special with it.’ Now I’m intrigued. I really want to hear what the performer has to say about the record through performance. I can hear that they love the music and their own performance is uniquely inspired.

We ask all of the students in the jazz program’s small ensembles to announce every tune from the stage in performance. We also ask them to write it up (a paragraph or so about each tune they introduce). They then have to practice at the sound check. It’s very interesting because it’s something new to them. They might not be used to doing that. It just takes coaching. They need to know what is ok to say. Did they enjoy rehearsing the piece? Even something like that could work. They might also share the date of composition, when the record came out; that can be interesting too, but I want a human connection. So, again, as far as ‘cliché,’ I’m easy. Just make it sincere. If you don’t mean it, don’t waste your time saying it.”
Are there ways in which the public speaking has detracted from the performance, or has been distracting to the audience?

“Of course. As we ask students to do this, I might see it as a distraction when perhaps overly exuberant students talk for too long, or talk too much about themselves, or fail to reference their colleagues on stage or even the people who have made this music possible. It’s a delicate balance. Although I said it is important to make a human connection, ideally that connection should still lead more toward the music (or dance or other types of performances) and not just to you as a person. The person who is speaking should be a conduit through which people understand more about the art. Whenever the person wants it all to be about them, and they step over the art, it’s a distraction. Then I have to get past thinking about you, and reset for the art. Whether I like you or not, I want to hear more about the music.”

When you came to Juilliard a couple of years ago and began making some curricular adjustments, it seems to me like a lot of these things were already being built in. What do you think has caused Juilliard to now decide to require all students to speak as a component of their graduation recitals?

“I actually just said ‘great!’ I didn’t even ask why. I agreed. We are already adjusting our curriculum in a lot of ways to include this in their classes. I had no questions when Juilliard made this decision. Our President has spoken extensively about ‘The Artist as Citizen;” the Writing and Communications Center was created several years ago; the Marks Center for Career Services and Entrepreneurship was created and emphasizes this. An entrepreneur would of course be a speaker, as would anyone who would be an ‘ambassador of the artform.’ I wasn’t surprised at all. I was happy about it.”
Some performers choose to provide the audience with a “narrative” or something to assist the audience, particularly with larger works. While I feel that is a helpful device, I also can see that a performer should be careful about imposing their narrative onto the listener, so as not to overly shape the listener experience. I’m curious what your thoughts are with regard to sharing your own personal narrative with the audience.

“That’s a challenge. I’m particularly passionate about the human components; like the rehearsal process, the reason you chose the work, the composer’s process, the choreographer’s process. I do see that there is a danger of putting too tight of a frame around what is there. Too much could information could become limiting. As a performer, I’ve used imagery or stories to help me to connect and organize my musical ideas, but that’s kept to me. I allow the audience to take from the piece what they will, but maybe I have some personal things to share. I won’t provide them with the full story or program that I have in my mind. The reason that my story is meaningful may not apply to the listeners.

I think it’s important to empower the audience. The person speaking from the stage has an implied power, and so you can use that power to give the audience freedom to go in whatever creative direction they choose.”

Do you think that performers’ attitudes toward public speaking are polarizing in any way?

I often feel that people either accept it and do it, or hate it and don’t.

“It is my sense that speaking from the stage is much more expected in jazz than in classical music, but also in jazz, depending on the instrument you play the expectation might be different. For someone in the rhythm section, or in a more accompaniment
capacity, there is less of an expectation that you would be speaking. If you are a front-line player or the group leader, they have to do it.

I don’t know that it’s really *polarizing*. Some people just don’t revel in that. Perhaps some people who aren’t comfortable with speaking try to pour even more of what they have to say into the music itself. The music is sensory. You still feel it. It doesn’t have to be so cerebral. If the audience doesn’t feel what I’m trying to convey through the music, I’m not successful. I don’t always have to tell a story.

I think it should be up to the artist, but I do think any artist in this century has a responsibility to learn this skill. It’s like teaching, just because you have the skill to perform doesn’t mean you have the ability to break down the components of what you do and explain it to someone else. Speaking (and writing) are increasingly becoming something that an artist needs to be able to do. Schools should definitely be teaching this.”

Do you think speaking from the stage is an important component of career advancement for performers?

“I think, first and foremost, will always be the quality of your art and how it moves people. Speaking should be aligned with that; the whole package. As a matter of *brand*, you are much more attractive. You are much more interesting, and the people who have the power in the arts are looking for people who are not only competent at executing their art form, but have a point of view. It’s fair to expect that they will demonstrate a refined point of view and maturity. It will come across in how they speak, how they write; and my sense is that our students who are successful have that sort of alignment. They play well, they speak well, they act well; it’s all the same. If someone plays a
certain way, but they are completely immature, you wonder if they really have a grasp of what they are doing. Typically not. It’s just a physical thing that they can do, but they’ve thought less about what they are trying to say artistically. They can’t articulate the impact of the art on society, or its impact on the next 30 years of their own life.

Promoters, people who would invest in your career, they are going to base that investment on how well your skills in all of the areas are aligned.”

I’ve very much enjoyed getting to know Aaron Flagg over the past two years and benefit from his extensive experience as an administrator and teacher. I feel strongly that he represents what I see as a “new wave” of administrators in arts education who truly see the benefit of career preparation from the first day a student sets foot on campus. This is particularly evident in the “Creative Ideas” course that is required of all jazz students throughout their time at Juilliard. This special topics lecture series takes place every week and brings outside jazz performers, educators, and arts leaders in to speak with the students and expand their career vocabulary.

As mentioned in the interview, jazz students at Juilliard are always required to speak as a component of their public performances. In doing so, they learn to relate to the audience and to seek out the deeper meaning behind the music they are performing. They learn that having a conversational fluency about a genre or specific piece opens the doorway to understanding the work on a higher plane as a performer, and also as an audience member. Transcending musical familiarity is Aaron’s strong contention that it is important for the future of music in society that our students know how to best articulate what it is that they do and why they do it. This reinforces jazz faculty member Rodney Jones’ assertion that students must not just know the “how” of jazz music, but also the “why.”
A great thing about the mandatory speaking element for jazz students is the fact that they always perform in ensemble settings; therefore, they continually benefit from hearing their peers and receiving their feedback. They are far more inclined to develop a level of comfort that our classical musicians often find challenging.

5. Interview – Joseph W. Polisi

As with most staff, faculty, and students, Joseph Polisi’s leadership has had a profound influence on my views of higher education as well as the role of the arts in society. Polisi became President of The Juilliard School in 1984, now serving in his 32nd year, the longest tenure of any Juilliard president. I have had the pleasure of serving alongside Polisi on a number of recent committees formed to oversee aspects of Juilliard’s entrepreneurship and grant programs. Polisi also teaches a course at Juilliard for upperclassmen and graduate students entitled “American Society and the Arts,” and in it he discusses the role that young artists will have on the future of society in its multiple facets. He requires student presentations which require research and public speaking. He also observes the students as they interact and network with one another throughout the semester.

In a recent conversation, he and I discussed the importance of equipping our students with solid communication skills, the ability to write and speak fluently and with integrity about their art, all in addition to honing their craft as exceptional performers. I was very pleased to have the opportunity to sit down with Polisi to discuss these important skills, along with Juilliard’s recent shift/push toward encouraging public speaking as an essential skill.
In recent years, Juilliard has placed a significant emphasis on the importance of preparing our students to be effective communicators through writing and speaking. What was the impetus for making these skills more of a priority in the curriculum?

“I’ve always felt throughout my time as President that it is extremely important to provide the skill sets that young artists will need when they go out into the field. Those skill sets have changed in my 32 years for sure. Technology, for example, has become a much more important element than it was a while ago. It didn’t really even exist as an issue in 1984 or ’85. What has been consistent has been the need for young artists to be capable, good writers, and good public speakers. We have done a good deal of work on the writing side, with the creation of our writing center, which is now the Writing and Communications Center, but we haven’t done as much work on the speaking side. The speaking side is in some ways a no-brainer, because there are so many requests and needs for the artist to speak in public venues about the music, about themselves, about the nature of their process. Most of the time it’s quite clear that people who are invited back for these types of performances are those that are the most articulate and most engaging. Young artists sometimes forget that they are perceived as individuals, as well as violinists or bassoonists. Being an engaging individual allows them to break down a lot of the walls, and to make the audience’s experience better. I am a huge fan of preparing our young artists to be able to talk about their art. I do not buy in, at all, to the idea that you don’t need to talk about art. We do need to present the art in its intended form, with great integrity, and a high level of excellence (no question); but it’s also an enhancement if an artist can talk about the work as well in a sincere and profound way.”
Have you witnessed ways in which training students to speak publicly has yielded results that were less than positive?

“Yes, I have seen situations in which the public speaking tones down, or presents the music in a way that is not at a high level. So, you have to make sure that the level of excellence of the performance has to match the level of excellence of the public speaking. There have been plenty of times when I have seen presenters talk about a piece unsuccessfully. They ‘dumb down’ the piece and by the time the person starts playing, they’ve lost 50% of their audience. So, yes, there are downsides, and you have to make sure you are just as effective of a speaker as you are a performer.”

Have you seen commonalities among the less experienced public speakers regarding subject matter, fluency, or overall presentation?

“The biggest problems I see are apocryphal tales told in a semi-amusing way, where they try to ‘dumb down’ the situation. Those can be annoying or inaccurate. It’s extremely important that the speaker have a true and real knowledge of what they are talking about. Aside from that knowledge, I often suggest to young speakers that they do it from the heart, instead of ‘the brain,’ so to speak. They should explain why the piece is important to them. Most of the time audiences don’t even think about the relationship between the work and the performer. They just think it is some sort of symbiotic relationship or integration that just takes place. Many times these works are extremely important emotionally, psychologically, and artistically to the performer. Explaining that is so much more interesting than saying if Beethoven had a nephew who didn’t play his scales.”

Are there any shining characteristics of the effective public speakers that you notice?
“The things that strike me as most effective are the ability to be technically articulate; to have a ‘twinkle in your eye,’ and certain sense of humor (without going over the edge, having a very interesting and deep knowledge of the piece, and periodically getting to a certain level of sophistication with the audience, no matter who it is. Having a mix of humor, integrity, understanding, and intellectual depth, I think is the most effective way of handling these sorts of presentations. What works least, in my opinion, are efforts at being funny that are sophomoric; facts that really aren’t facts; or misinterpretations of the music, or the composer, or both.”

As a musician, do you think that the process of preparing for public speaking has any sort of impact on musical interpretation or performance practice?

“A very important point to make to a performer who is going to be speaking and then playing is that they are two very different activities. You have to practice speaking and then playing. I’m a wind player, for example, and the first time I started doing this, I remember that my mouth was extremely dry because I had just been speaking for five minutes. So prepare; whether it’s a glass of water on the stage, or just understanding how to go from one act to the other. Gather your wits about you. Remember that you are on a very different track when going from one to the other.”

Are there concert settings in which the stand-alone performance is all you need, and public speaking is unnecessary?

“I think if you have a monumental work in which the music ‘speaks for itself,’ I can certainly understand that. Some of those works that are so iconic, the weight and presence of them speaks for themselves. The scope is so large, that it may be difficult to even effectively provide commentary. I think you have to size up the situation. Often the
music director or conductor will talk about a new piece. Sure, one can say ‘let the music do its own talking,’ but I do think for a new piece it may be important to give the listener some ways of grabbing hold of the piece as it goes on. I have had colleagues who might say ‘this is one of the great string quartets. I don’t want to besmirch it by talking about it.’ If it’s infantile or rudimentary, then it does negate the effect of the work. If there is something you can share about the process of working through it, or why you selected the work, that’s a different story. I think that goes back to what I was saying earlier at making connections with the audience.

You are engaged to speak publicly on a frequent basis. In what ways do you prepare for speeches, pre-performance talks, or even classroom lectures?

“First of all, as a speaker you have to know what venue you are speaking in, and decide the type of atmosphere you want to create. If I am a commencement speaker, I feel I should be a little more formal, rather than extemporaneous. I will prepare a written text, and I will rehearse the written text, I will pace the written text. One has to learn (and you do pretty quickly) that when you write a text and then speak it, those are two different things. What looks good on paper may not be very good when you say it. There may be words in succession that are too difficult or uncomfortable to pronounce, so you rephrase. I mark up my speech. I draw arrows to show when I want a break to take place. I add breath marks. I often write in the word ‘slow,’ because one of the biggest mistakes people make is speaking too quickly.

If I feel as though the venue lends itself to a more extemporaneous quality—a faculty meeting, a student meeting, a more relaxed gathering, or introducing a musical idea at a concert—either I won’t bring any notes, and just be prepared in general. I might
also bring bullet points, or just a few words to serve as reminders of what I need to say. One has to be careful not to go on too long. Inexperienced speakers have no sense of time. They will often go well beyond the time limits. I’m a real stickler for that. I’m stunned at how many times we will give a faculty member or someone just a few minutes. They say ‘sure, no problem,’ and then 20 minutes later they don’t realize how far over time they have gone. Being more concise is better. Yes, there are all sorts of reasons why you might give 45-minute speeches, but they are rare. If you give a 45-minute speech you better be certain that the content is worthy of the duration. So, I think about those things a lot.”

**Do you think a lot of institutions are doing things to further develop their students’ public speaking skills?**

“I think a lot of institutions talk about it. I don’t think a lot of institutions actually get into the trenches and do the work. There is a big difference between asking a student to speak for five minutes as a presentation in a class on a prepared topic, and actually speaking in public with their technique being evaluated. Teachers will often critique the content, but they rarely will critique the presentation elements. On the other side, I’ve had students who are very strong on the presentation side, and weak on content. There are all sorts of things I do when working with my students in class. I talk about things like breath support from the diaphragm. I talk about speaking loudly. Many times they aren’t even heard. They need to learn to speak with a good deal of force. Another mistake is not watching your pace. I often explain to students by using musical terms. ‘Your tempo marking is Adagio, and your dynamic is no softer than mezzo forte. Adagio. Mezzo forte.’
These are things that need to be worked on and practiced. Rarely do I see situations where these things are really being enforced and practiced.”

Do you think there has been a learning curve for educators as well in this area, thinking about how they should approach this topic, and how do they incorporate it into studio or classroom instruction?

“I know some studio instructors do it, but I wish they all would. Back when I started here in 1984, the idea of speaking from the stage was an anathema to the musical experience. There was a sort of ‘let us all worship on the altar of music together’ mentality. In other words, music was supposed to be like some sort of religious experience. You didn’t get in the way of Beethoven with your words. I hope the world has changed a little bit.”

With regard to career development, would you say that being an effective public speaker lends itself to success?

“I don’t think there is any question about that. Absolutely. When I am looking for faculty members, I want to see articulate, committed individuals. There have been cases where an individual might come in highly recommended, but that’s pretty much it. When I try to find out more about them, I get nothing. To me, the music is bigger than the instrument. In an interview, which is of course different from public speaking, but like speaking from the stage you still have to be genuine and substantive.”

Joseph Polisi is always particularly compelling when he speaks about issues that may have a direct impact on the future of the performing arts. He certainly believes that a performer’s ability to connect with their audience is vital to the proliferation of music. I appreciated his
candor when discussing the resistance of some educators to take the time to prepare students for speaking from the stage, as they may feel it distracts or detracts from what they feel should be the students’ primary focus. While this is something that I have perceived to a small degree with faculty at Juilliard and elsewhere, it is certainly becoming less common. I think this is due in part to the fact that, as most of the interviewees have stated, public speaking is beneficial for career success and not just audience engagement.

I was also inspired by Polisi’s insistence that integrity be a central part of a student’s understanding of the importance of public speaking. Performers have an obligation to realize the intent of the composer, for example, but that tenet stands not only in the actual performance, but also in the way in which the performer speaks about a work. Factual inaccuracies should certainly be avoided, but there is also much to be said about the integrity and overall personality and presentation of the individual.
VII. CURRICULAR EXPANSION AND PRACTICAL TOOLS

1. Thoughts on a Curriculum to Support Public Speaking

The 2016-2017 academic year at Juilliard will reflect a significant shift in attitude toward student preparedness in areas of entrepreneurship, communication, and forward thinking. For the first time, the school will institute its first mandatory course providing a conceptual overview, motivation, and unique insight into what it means to be an artist in the 21st century. The new course, entitled “Essentials of Entrepreneurship in the Arts” will certainly have a significant emphasis on communication and presentation skills, perhaps even more so than the actual mechanics of business. Outside presenters will be featured, intended to inspire students to think more broadly about the direction that their career can take them. Students will be challenged to think about music and about their audiences in new and different ways.

A sample module that will take place is centered on the concept of creating a “visual business plan,” as well as a fundamental vocabulary to use when talking about business strategies in a professional forum. Rather than trying to desperately weave in high-level economics and marketing lingo, the goal will be to give the students a baseline vocabulary to best articulate their plan. They will also explore ways in which this storyboarded visual business plan will enable them to identify a target market for their concert programs, explore ways in which to best connect with their audience in advance of the performance, and also how to best connect with the audience from the stage and build a lasting rapport. Our guest speakers will also provide some transitional resources necessary to bring their entrepreneurial concept to life through a professional and presentable format. Most importantly, the central theme will be teaching the students to verbally communicate their ideas efficiently and effectively.
The faculty sees an inseparable correlation between entrepreneurship and communication. As students hear from successful social entrepreneurs, arts leaders, innovative performers, and inspired educators, they will also be challenged to develop their own unique project throughout the semester-long course. The project may be as small as creating a unique interactive concert program, or as vast as developing a strategy for creating a summer music academy. Along the way, they will be required not only to brainstorm and think outside the box, but also to learn how to best communicate their ideas to colleagues, peers, prospective buyers, and new audiences. We are confident that this will provide a solid foundation for students as they prepare to speak from the stage, ultimately culminating in an essential curricular requirement—that all students must speak from the stage as a component of their graduation recital in order to receive their degree.

As I often hear from colleagues and fellow performers; the best way to hone public speaking skills is to speak in public! Find opportunities to incorporate these spoken elements into performances, starting first with audiences and venues that give you comfort, and moving to greater challenges. We intend to provide our students with ample opportunities to develop their speaking skills in “safe” spaces, where they feel comfortable making mistakes, receiving criticism, and understanding that speaking is a skill to be honed that is not unlike the time they spend on their instrument in a practice room.

As of today, weekly public speaking practice sessions are offered for all students. The students sign up for times that they can meet in small groups with other students, guided by an experienced faculty member, to practice. Students are also able to make appointments with the Marks Center staff at any time to work one-on-one (there is no limit to the number of appointments that students can make). Fortunately with today’s technology, the students do not
even have to be present to work with a staff or faculty member. We have had multiple appointments with students over Skype, and also have the ability to allow students to pre-record and submit spoken materials through our online internal Career Portal. In addition to these more personal options, the Marks Center offers larger seminars in public speaking throughout the year, particularly those which emphasize audience development, “crowdsourcing,” and preparing an “elevator pitch.” Such guest presenters have included Paola Prestini (Executive and Creative Director of National Sawdust), Laura Callanan (former Senior Deputy Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts), Elaine Grogan-Lutrell (author of *Arts and Numbers*), and Ara Guzelimian (Juilliard’s Dean and Provost).

I feel both excited and extremely validated that The Juilliard School recognizes public speaking as an essential component of a musician’s career. The school has most definitely put out the funding and resources to make sure students have virtually every opportunity to polish this skill set. However, there is still a vital, perhaps “cultural” hurdle that presents a challenge. That is, in order for us to effectively educate students in this area, they must understand why it is important. As I mentioned in my introduction, some faculty members do not view this as an area to target through their teaching. Perhaps some teachers are ill-equipped to deal with the subject, or perhaps they just don’t have the time or willingness to add another challenge to the rubric. Regardless, it is important that they understand that even if they are unable to assist in this area, the school provides plenty of resources that they can call upon in order to fill in these blanks. It takes more than just one office, one school-wide initiative, or a few strong voices to convince hundreds of educators to acknowledge the need for something new. However, with strong support from the top down, and demonstrable proof that such training benefits students not just in their spoken eloquence, but also in their performance practice, I feel extremely confident that
the successful 21st century artists will not just be those who have virtuosic talent, but also those who know how to talk about what they do.

Because so much of what we provide to our students includes direct feedback and support, I have included in the next two sections a pilot survey tool and a “worksheet” that I incorporate into most of my student coaching sessions. The worksheet emphasizes the areas of observation that I have previously discussed and highlighted as essential areas for performers to consider.

2. Using a Survey as a Tool for Evaluation and Improvement

Daphne Leong’s study, “Framing New Music: the effect of preparatory conditions on audience response to Morris’s Clear Sounds (2013),”33 discusses ways that a performer might better “frame” music that is more of a challenge for a typical concert audience. She specifically states that “music by composers such as Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Anton Webern, ad others, despite its acknowledged importance, is often disliked or misunderstood, even if a modicum of listeners enjoy this music.” (p. 1)

I certainly agree with the idea that in many situations, an audience’s appreciation of more complicated or unfamiliar music can be improved through providing additional contextual information. Leong divided the ways in which the audience was prepared in five different ways before watching a video of a performance: C1 – simple identification (just the title of the piece, date of composition, composer name, and performer name); C2 – program note (a brief

discussion from the composer describing the piece—which was derived from a handscroll from
the Ch’ing Dynasty—and some information about the piece’s structure, in addition to C1); C3 –
aesthetic/visual information (C1 and C2, and in addition, a 5-minute video including an aesthetic
introduction including images from the handscroll); C4 – structural/aural introduction (C1 and
C2, and in addition, a 5-minute video demonstration at the piano of the work’s primary harmonic
components); and C5 – combination (all of the introductory components above).

From a quantitative standpoint, she included some basic prompts. Of particular interest to
me were rankings of the following prompts: A2 – “How much do you like the piece?”; A3 –
“Would you listen to this piece again?”; and A4 – “The music held my attention.” While she
included some additional prompts, she found no significant results or tendencies among the first
four types of preparation. However, with regard to the three questions above, C5 (all of the
introductory components) was the only method of preparation that yielded a contingency of
respondents giving the top ranking to all three of those prompts. “In no other group did any
participant give more than a single top ranking to these three questions.” (p. 10)

From a qualitative standpoint, Leong was interested in finding out what questions or
observations were stirred from each type of preparation. This analysis showed that as separate
groups of listeners were given progressively more information, they seemed to have an improved
understanding of the piece, with more considerate questions and comments, “and perhaps a
greater appreciation.” (p. 10)

The overt complexity of the work that was used in this study may have played a
significant role in the audiences’ abilities to interpret or appreciate overall. A general lack of
familiarity with the whole genre (including harmonics, structure, etc…) in general may
contribute to some of the reactions received from respondents of C5 such as, “I cannot say I like
or dislike it because it is so different from my past experience that I don’t know how to judge it.” (p. 10-11) Perhaps the most relevant quote from a respondent to this document, which Leong uses to close her presentation, is from one of the C4 observers that seems to best articulate a desire from audiences for “greater learning.” The respondent wrote, “Unsure what to take from the performance. As someone unfamiliar with the music, I did want to know more. I’m curious about the sound, the emotion and the overall significance… I came in unfamiliar and left curious.” (p. 11)

This snapshot extrapolated from Leong’s complex study reinforces much of what I feel a performer should be aware, especially those performers who present work that they feel may be particularly challenging to the listener. The study utilizes the same areas of observation that I encourage performers to consider when preparing to speak from the stage, and in a few different combinations.

At the suggestion of faculty and colleagues, I decided to put some of my ideas regarding the correlation between public speaking and audience appreciation “to the test.” I thought it might be a helpful exercise to design a pilot survey project, engage a small, randomized sample of respondents, and weigh their responses based on two scenarios. The scenarios presented offer two different types of conversations a performer might have with an audience to introduce a piece of music. My hope is that a survey like this, which can be assembled with relative ease, could also be used as a tool for performers who would like to gauge potential listener impact of what they intend to present in actual performance settings. However, I certainly acknowledge that there is a certain level of subjectivity associated with this particular study, which I will discuss later.
Having used Amazon’s Mechanical Turk to retrieve informal survey data for various unrelated research projects in the past, I thought it would be the best route for this endeavor. I also consulted with a few professionals in the field of Sociology who also frequently use MT for scholarly research. Just to give a brief explanation, Mechanical Turk is a utility which allows “requesters” to formulate a “human intelligence task” (in this case, a short survey) for verified “workers” to complete in exchange for nominal compensation. The MT workers are anonymous and verified through a process in which they prove they are not “bots,” or fake computerized users, and are gradually ranked according to the quality of the responses that they provide as members. For example, a worker who initiates but does not complete a task is given a lower tier of status. Requesters can select the quality of workers that they want as participants, and with a sample size as small as what I was going for (30), higher quality workers were required.

The design of this exercise consisted of two surveys, and accessed two separate sample groups. Each sample group was asked to watch a brief video of a performance prefaced by speaking. I used myself as the performer. In each video, I provided an introduction to the excerpt that I was to perform (a piece that I composed for solo hand drum in 2015), followed by a cross-fade into the excerpt. Survey respondents (workers) then completed a short survey to help analyze their reaction to the spoken component.

For the first introduction, I attempted to provide primarily foundational, structural information. I spoke about the basics of sound creation, gave an overview of the structure of the excerpt, and some information about the rhythms utilized. I avoided personal narrative or profound observations. In the second survey sample, a different introduction to the work was provided in which I briefly covered all four of my designated areas of observation (including a greater emphasis on the narrative and profound observations). There was again a cross-fade into
the excerpt, which was the exact same performance as the first video. The new set of respondents were asked to complete the same survey.

Survey questions consisted of the following:

- Did the performer’s speech before the performance influence your listening experience (either positively or negatively)?
  - Yes
  - No

- On the following scale, how would you describe the way the performer’s speaking affected your listening experience?
  - Very Negatively
  - Somewhat Negatively
  - Not at all
  - Somewhat Positively
  - Very Positively

- Please check the boxes that coincide with things that were discussed by the performer.
  - Information about the instruments being used
  - Information about how the sounds are created
  - Historical information about the music being performed
  - Information about the composer
  - Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms
  - Information about other concepts, imagery, or storytelling
• Information about the performer’s own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed

• Of those items, what did you find to have the most positive impact on your listening experience? (Select one.)
  o Information about the instruments being used
  o Information about how the sounds are created
  o Historical information about the music being performed
  o Information about the composer
  o Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms
  o Information about other concepts, imagery, or storytelling
  o Information about the performer’s own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed
  o None of them

• Of those items, what did you find to have the least positive impact on your listening experience? (Select one.)
  o Information about the instruments being used
  o Information about how the sounds are created
  o Historical information about the music being performed
  o Information about the composer
  o Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms
  o Information about other concepts, imagery, or storytelling
  o Information about the performer’s own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed
• Should performers include speaking to the audience as a component of a performance?
  o Yes
  o No
  o No opinion
  o Maybe

• How many musical performances have you attended in the last 12 months?
  o Less than three
  o Between three and ten
  o More than ten

The first survey, which was simple and fairly dry in terms of speaking, included the following introduction:

“Hello, my name is Barrett Hipes. I am a percussionist, and I will be performing an excerpt from a work that I composed entitled *I do not know this drum*. The work utilizes some basic hand drumming techniques including playing with palms, fingers, and finger tips to create different tones and effects. In this excerpt, I use the bottom of the drum rather than the drum head. You will see that the bottom of the drum is open, so I will be striking the rim and outside shell. I can manipulate that sound by covering or uncovering the hole as well.

The introductory portion of the piece is a basic improvisation with a few small rhythmic motives that develop further as the piece progresses. The piece then proceeds into a quick rhythmic section consisting of fast perpetual 16th notes in 4/4 time, with
various accent patterns and subdivisions of the beat into triplets and sextuplets. Fluctuating crescendos and decrescendos are also employed to add contrast. The excerpt then slows and returns to a character similar to the opening section, but with an elaboration of the improvisatory statements from the beginning.” (Video then cross-fades into the performance.)

My goal with this introduction was to just be very straightforward and provide absolute basics; a few foundational and theoretic observations. I did not provide any sort of backstory, narrative or profound observations, or go into greater detail.

The second introduction for the second survey group, slightly more complex, personal, and inclusive of the various levels of observation, included the following introduction:

“Hello, my name is Barrett Hipes and I am a percussionist from Arkansas. I am going to be performing a short excerpt of a piece of music that I wrote called I do not know this drum. I wrote the piece in 2015, and it’s written for an African drum called a kpanlogo drum (lifted the drum up to show). I actually wrote the piece as sort of a play on the fact that when I started as a percussionist, I didn’t know a whole lot about all of the instruments in the percussion family. I started taking a West African drumming class in graduate school and was introduced to this drum. It just looked very unusual and interesting to me. It of course had a drum head which I was sure that you hit with a stick or with your hand or another apparatus. It also has a hole in the bottom (showed the bottom), has interesting strings on the side (plucked the strings), and I just wasn’t sure how to approach it.

That was sort of representative of my entire foray into percussion. I was always coming across new instruments that you could hit or play with your hands, or would use
in some sort of unique fashion that wasn’t immediately clear when you first saw the instrument. So that is part of the story of me growing up as a percussionist. You’ll notice that in the excerpt of the piece I am going to play, that it actually starts with playing the drum upside-down. I make some unique sounds by using the hole in the bottom of the drum which include hollow bass sounds by playing in the middle (demonstrated), and _slappy_ or _tinny_ sounds by hitting the edges and outside (demonstrated). I’m not going to play a short example from the piece.” (Video then cross-fades to the performance.)

My goal with this introduction was to give the audience a more personalized view into how and why the piece was written, as well as an overview of the history and “nuts-and-bolts” of the work. It takes a little more time to go into this level of depth and detail, and it is tempting to talk too much. With this introduction, I did my best to pare it down to a few elements that I wanted to emphasize, particularly for an audience of an unknown level of musical experience. I wanted to demonstrate through this survey how speaking from the stage does have an impact on the listener experience overall, and also that a prepared speech inclusive of more than just two basic levels of observation would elicit a better audience experience. A comparison of the two surveys shows that covering more than just the facts, and including narrative and profound observations, can have a more positive experience on the listener overall.

I was glad to see that upon analysis of the results of both surveys, the respondents (though not by a large margin) did tend to prefer the more personalized introduction—which included at least one comment from each of the four levels of observation—over the dryer, analytical style. At the same time, the majority of respondents seemed to react either “somewhat positively” or “very positively” to the spoken component overall, regardless of the content covered in the speech.
I do not consider this pilot survey to be flawless or perfect in terms of science or metrics, but I do think that it is a nice place to start when measuring the types of things that an audience prefers to hear, as well as the simple question of whether or not an audience even wants to hear what the performer has to say. There are many very subjective aspects when asking an audience to evaluate the components of public speaking that they view as most impactful, as well as the effectiveness of the speech as a whole. Consider the third survey question, for example, in which the sample was asked to check off the items that the performer discussed in his speech. Even with something as straightforward as a checklist, audience members “heard” different things, with responses perhaps dependent upon those that were most important to them individually, or perhaps because I delivered the speech in a way that inadvertently punctuated or emphasized certain areas over others. Regardless, there are so many subjective factors when it comes to an audience member’s perception that it is hard to determine with exact measure, especially in a simple pilot survey such as this, what levels of observation not only resonate most positively, but also what levels of observation even receive sufficient attention for evaluation by the audience.

Areas of note/relevance when comparing the surveys include a slight percentage increase of respondents who felt that the second speech had more of an influence on their listening experience (an increase of 3.3%). In addition 22 respondents in the second survey (longer speech) felt the speaking element affected their experience either somewhat positively or very positively, versus only 19 respondents in the first survey who felt the same. The results of the third question suggest that the biggest perceivable difference between the first and second speeches was the inclusion of “information about the performer’s own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed.” This is what I label as the profound level of observation. The fifth question is also interesting in that the highest percentage of both sets of
respondents said that none of the spoken components had the “least positive impact” on their experience, implying that a majority of listeners prefer hearing the performer talk about something. This is reinforced in question six, in which the majority of both sets of respondents (60% and 66.7% respectively) felt that performers should speak as a component of their performance.

As easy as this exercise was to construct, I think using a similar survey in preparation for speaking from the stage—whether through an anonymous survey using a film such as this, or in a class or small group setting—can be a very valuable way to demonstrate to performers the elements of a speech that are most beneficial to the audience. It also informs the performer of the discussion points that stand out for the listener in both positive and negative ways; certainly something that is not always immediately apparent to the performer when constructing the speech.

In the successive pages, I have provided the data compiled from the two surveys conducted.
Question 1, Survey 1 (minimal spoken introduction)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*answered question 30  skipped question 0*

Tab. 1

Question 1, Survey 2 (more informative introduction)

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<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question 30  skipped question 0*

Tab. 2
## Question 2, Survey 1

**On the following scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
<th>Somewhat Negatively</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat Positively</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the way the performer(s) speaking affected your listening experience?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tab. 3**

## Question 2, Survey 2

**On the following scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
<th>Somewhat Negatively</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat Positively</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the way the performer’s speaking affected your listening experience?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tab. 4**
### Question 3, Survey 1

Please check the boxes that coincide with things that were discussed by the performer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about the instruments being used</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about how the sounds are created</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical information about the music being performed</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the composer(s)</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about other concepts, imagery, or storytelling</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the performers’ own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Answered question:** 30  
**Skipped question:** 0

---

### Question 3, Survey 2

Please check the boxes that coincide with things that were discussed by the performer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Information about how the sounds are created</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical information about the music being performed</td>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the composer</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about other concepts, imagery, or storytelling</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information about the performer’s own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
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**Answered question:** 30  
**Skipped question:** 0

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Tab. 5

Tab. 6
### Question 4, Survey 1

**Of those items, what did you find to have the most positive impact on your listening experience?**

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Information about the composer(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about abstract concepts, imagery, or storytelling</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the performer’s own feelings, personal stories, or attachment to the music being performed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of them.</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
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answered question: 30

skipped question: 0

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### Question 4, Survey 2

**Of those items, what did you find to have the most positive impact on your listening experience?**

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<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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<td>Information about how the sounds are created</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
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<td>Historical information about the music being performed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the composer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information about styles, form, melodies, or other musical terms</td>
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<td>Information about abstract concepts, imagery, or storytelling</td>
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answered question: 30

skipped question: 0

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**Tab. 7**

**Tab. 8**
Question 5, Survey 1

Of those items, what did you find to have the least positive impact on your listening experience?

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answered question 30
skipped question 0

Tab. 9

Question 5, Survey 2

Of those items, what did you find to have the least positive impact on your listening experience?

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<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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answered question 30
skipped question 0

Tab. 10
**Question 6, Survey 1**

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**Answer Options**

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**Question 6, Survey 2**

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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
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**Answer Options**

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Tab. 11

Tab. 12
Question 7, Survey 1

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<tr>
<td>More than ten</td>
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answered question 30
skipped question 0

Tab. 13

Question 7, Survey 2

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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>More than ten</td>
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answered question 30
skipped question 0

Tab. 14
3. The Performance Conversation – Planning Guide

AREAS OF OBSERVATION AND POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS

Read and consider each of the components below and complete the attached worksheet using these defined levels of observation and entry points as a guide.

INTRODUCTION

The performer should not overlook the importance of introducing him/herself, fellow musicians, and the program. This first impression sets the tone for continued conversation. The type of venue and audience will determine the method of address (formal, informal, casual, etc…).

FOUNDATIONAL

This area is defined as the visual, aural, or physical aspects of performance that are observed prior to analysis. This level of observation primarily involves how the musician is producing sound, interacting with other musicians, and utilizing the performance space. The performer should also consider any unique sounds or extended techniques that may not be immediately recognized by the listener.

Sample Considerations:

Is there anything about the instrumentation that warrants explanation?

Does this piece use extended techniques or unusual sounds?

Is the performance space unique, or being used in an unusual way?

Is the visual configuration of the performer(s) nontraditional?

HISTORICAL/THEORETIC

This area of observation includes form, style, phrase structure, meter, historical context, and any other analytical facts pertinent to the music being performed. The performer should consider the
experience level of the audience, the type of performance (educational, interactive, entertainment, etc...), and the type of venue.

Sample Considerations:

What is the experience level of the audience (general audience, trained musicians, etc...)?

Will reference to theory or history enhance the listener experience?

Can the historical context support the abstract level of observation (below)?

Do the concrete observations provide a conversational through-line for the program?

NARRATIVE

This area of observation includes aspects of creativity, emotion, expression, imagery, and story. The performer should research the composer’s own descriptors or storyline applied to the work (if available), or craft a narrative that gives the listener a figurative “road map” to guide them through the piece. Abstract observations are particularly useful with longer works or those that may present a challenge to the audience.

Sample Considerations:

Has the composer provided insight into abstract elements of the composition?

Does the title of the work (or movement) evoke a particular story or image?

Is the piece programmatic in nature?

How do foundational and concrete observations support the narrative?

PROFOUND

This most personal area of observation requires the performer to find their own meaning or sense of attachment to the piece or program. It allows the performer to convey their personality and approach to the work. It provides the audience with deeper insight into the creative process.
Sample Considerations:

*How does the piece make you feel?*

*What initially drew you to the work?*

*What storylines or emotive elements have helped shape your approach to the music?*

**WORKSHEET**

In a list or in prose, provide entry points within each level of observation. Consider not only *what* you intend to say, but *how* you intend to say it.

**INTRODUCTION**

How do you intend to introduce yourself or your ensemble to the audience? At what point in the program will the introduction take place?

**FOUNDATIONAL**

As previously defined, list at least two potential entry points involving the foundational level of observation for your program as a whole, and for the individual works.

- Program
- Individual Works

**THEORETIC/HISTORICAL**

Continue the exercise.

- Program
- Individual Works

**NARRATIVE**

Continue the exercise.

- Program
- Individual Works
PROFOUND

Continue the exercise.

- Program
- Individual Works

END RESULT

Every level of observation and detail does not have to be brought to the conversation. For each spoken component (i.e. prior to or between pieces), use your notes to decide which observation will most effectively enhance the listener experience. Select the points in your program that you intend to speak about and in an outline or prose, write what you intend to say at each point, selected from the worksheet above. Practice speaking. A strong musical performance can be enhanced or diminished by the overall presentation.

“There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, **what we say, and how we say it.**” – Dale Carnegie
4. Other Resources

There are of course plenty of guides and resources that go beyond what I have covered in this document. I often refer inexperienced students to chapters of various books and manuals, or encourage those who are especially advanced to look for new ways to think and improve in areas of public speaking and audience engagement, as well as proper elocution and alleviating anxiety. Some of the books that I have found especially helpful over the years, as well as some that are frequently recommended by my colleagues and peers, include the following:

- Max Atkinson, *Lend Me Your Ears: All You Need to Know about Making Speeches and Presentation*
- Angela Miles Beeching, *Beyond Talent*
- Graham Brown, *Public Speaking Like a Pro: How to relax, inspire and make them laugh with 60 habits of the world’s best presenters*
- Dale Carnegie, *The Quick and Easy Way to Effective Public Speaking*
- Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*
- David Cutler, *The Savvy Musician*
- W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis: The Classic Guide to the Mental Side of Performance*
- Robin Kermode, *Speak: So Your Audience Will Listen – 7 Steps to Confident and Successful Public Speaking*
- Stephen Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking*
- Edith Skinner, *Speak with Distinction*
VIII. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It seems apparent to me that the general consensus among educators is that public speaking should be folded in as an integral part of a performing artist’s education. Their ability to connect with the audience beyond the notes brings with it a sense of humanity, personality, and depth that brings the listener closer to understanding the creative process and develops a deeper appreciation. As classical music was canonized over the airwaves in the 1940’s, stalwart spokespersons emerged as the principal voices of classical music, taking the onus away from individual performers. Music came to be understood through traditional, implied, entrained, and historically undisputed assertions, and therefore the process of conversation among individual artists was lost to some degree.

It is difficult to be an advocate or disciple of the arts in society if one is adverse to or unskilled at speaking about their art form. As I have been discussing throughout this document, I (and many others) feel it is imperative that musicians develop a deeper understanding of the music that they perform through more than just an imposed, traditional performance practice, combined with an automatic interpretation that comes from unobstructed technical facility. They need to understand the basic components and how they fit together, and understand why the music exists as it does through context, narrative, and their own profound conclusions. Beyond that, young artists need to open up to their audience and in turn expand the scope of the future of music.

Public speaking requires practice. Much like a musical performance, the artist will have a difficult time demonstrating fluid technique and a relaxed but confident delivery without knowing how it will sound and work in advance. I challenge performers to make a game plan (see “The Performance Conversation – Planning Guide”) and to break down the observations
they have made throughout the learning process and their internal conversations. They can pragmatically arrange their observations by category, and by simple evaluation and elimination they leave themselves with the content they find most compelling or relevant to the listener experience. With each level of observation comes a clearer understanding of the music for the performer, allowing for a more reasoned and sensible interpretation, and providing them with the ability to effectively communicate with their audience.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Articles


**Digital Media and Images**


**Interviews**


Slobodien, Bonnie. New York, NY, February 1, 2015

