



*"Know your stuff.  
Know who you are stuffing.  
Stuff them well."*

John P. Paynter

Since I've never been accused of being a "thinker," simple, to-the-point sayings have been a tremendous help to me throughout my time in music education. But when one considers the late Mr. Paynter's pithy remarks in relation to quality teaching, what else is there really?

#### ***Know Your Stuff***

"Aye", as Billy Shakespeare would say, "there's the rub!" There are hundreds of textbooks, websites, articles, and tutorials about the field of music education. There are dozens of clinics, workshops, seminars, and symposia offered every year that focus on music teaching and learning. The reason being, in most cases, is that in our profession there is no finish line. True artist-teachers never "arrive"; they are always in the process of evolving. Evolution takes time and energy. When you stop growing as an artist and human being, you start dying as an artist and human being. If you are reading this article, you are very likely an accomplished performer on your instrument. It took many years of determined, concentrated effort for you to obtain a high level of musical and technical proficiency as a performer. The secret to becoming a great teacher-artist-conductor is employing the very same kind of determination, concentration, enthusiasm, love, energy, time, and methodical preparation toward being a teacher-artist-conductor.

#### ***Know Who Your Are Stuffing***

How well do you know your current students? Do you know everyone's name? Do you know what interests them beyond the classroom? Do you attempt to engage them outside of the rehearsal/performance

# THE SECRET

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setting? When you speak with them, do they have your full attention? It is through this sort of "extra" knowledge that we as mentors and guides can begin to shape our approaches both to individual students in our ensembles and, indirectly, to the group as a whole. You know the old saying: "Students won't care what you know until they know that you care." It's an old saying because, well...it's true. Armed with this knowledge, students will better be able to listen to (and not just hear) what you are saying both verbally and non-verbally, and eventually lower their defense mechanisms enough to allow deep, profound, lasting change to occur within themselves. When I write about "care," I am not referring to an invasion of a student's personal life. The kind of caring to which I refer is one that communicates to our students that there is more to life than what they are currently experiencing, and with concentrated effort, love of their work, and an eye firmly fixed on the future, anything is possible for each of them. Every student is unique and sometimes that uniqueness can shift day-to-day and minute-to-minute. One of our many responsibilities as mentors is to tap into that daily energy and to focus it on the love of music making.

#### ***Stuff Them Well***

For me, in the academic position I now occupy, it is the process (and not necessarily the final product) that is most important. Those who work in academic environments are primarily teachers and guides. Put even more simply, we are not in the concert business; we are educators. However, if artists-teachers-conductors do their job in an organized, effective, and artistic manner, a good (or even great) final product is usually the outcome. Our mission is to show students what is possible. Even if they are not fully able to demonstrate those possibilities, they should know those possibilities exist and see them just over the horizon. Our rehearsals

should be filled with discovery, beauty, and love for our work, not just a rendering of correct notes and rhythms. The art of performance can teach our students a great deal. But a poorly prepared performance really only teaches our students one thing: how to survive it without looking too silly. Every group of students tries to do their very best during a performance; but, for too many teachers, a decent performance is the ultimate goal.

When an artist-teacher-conductor approaches each rehearsal with immaculate preparation, a love for the music and the people who perform it, and with eyes and heart looking toward what is possible for their students, small miracles can occur each and every day. These small, sometimes nearly imperceptibly miraculous, daily improvements are the lifeblood of our profession.

My experience tells me that one of the secrets to an artist's-teacher's-conductor's success with any group of students is inextricably linked to the level of preparation that teacher brings to each rehearsal. Your study and preparation of the repertoire you choose should include not only the "when" and "where," but more importantly the "why" and "how" of each piece. Of course it is important to know that, say, the clarinet enters on the third beat of measure three, but it is more important to know (and feel and be able to communicate both verbally and non-verbally) why that entrance is important and exactly how you believe the composer might want it to sound.

"Occam's Razor" tells us that the simplest method is often the best method. In our highly complex, technological world, it's sometimes easy to overlook the simple things in life and to use them as inspiration and for guidance. Mr. Paynter's take on teaching should not be taken lightly, because, in the end, it's the secret to great teaching.

