



What makes a moving performance?

Upon completing a concert season, I find myself evaluating the overall performance with the usual criteria: tone quality, intonation, technique, musical expression, watching director and staying together, number of dropped drum sticks, number of fainting flute players, number of crying babies, etc. Lately, an even more important process for me is to reflect on the emotional impact a live performance has on the audience. What does the audience take away from the listening experience? How can a performing group create within a listener a thought, feeling or idea? In short, what makes a moving performance?

Before delving into this topic further, I must make a small disclaimer: as I begin to write this article, I have many more questions than answers. I have written earlier articles addressing ways to add motion to your music in order to create emotion in your music. This article focuses more on the outcome of the musical performance and its impact on the listener. In my attempt to uncover answers to these questions, I turn to recent events in my life that may offer insight or a possible connection. A lesson learned when buying a truck this past summer is that once I chose a model, I suddenly noticed all of the same style trucks on the road. When something is on your mind, your eyes are opened to what was already there.

Which is better?

My son just finished recording an audition for college scholarships. As we listened to the top couple tracks determining which one to submit, the question emerged, "Is it better to have a performance mistake-free but lacking a bit in musical expression or one that has some nice musical moments but also includes a few mistakes elsewhere?" I think that the musical moment is what the listener wants to experience, but the mistakes take the listener out of the moment. It is possible for a performance to be *moving* even if there are flaws present, so long as they aren't so great as to interrupt the communication of the musical idea. An absence of audible mistakes alone doesn't ensure a moving performance, but it does set the stage for the possibility of one to happen.

Where was I?

I recently attended a high school band

reunion where the former director talked about listening to old concert recordings. He said he was moved by the band's performance with its beautiful expression and musical feeling. However, he didn't remember hearing it that way at the time of the performance. He lamented, "During all of this, where was I?" I think part of the answer is that he was busy squelching flaws and eliminating mistakes, making the music as perfect as he could so that the audience had a chance to experience the profound impact of its message. Those were definitely moving performances.

As we seek the perfect performance that doesn't exist, are directors present and in the moment experiencing what is going right or are we so concerned with not getting it wrong that we miss out experiencing the moving performance?

Play with passion

On my way out the door to my community band rehearsal, my daughter nonchalantly said, "Bye, Dad. Have a good rehearsal—remember to play with passion." Can it be that simple? If the performers play with passion, is the audience guaranteed a moving performance? I believe that in order for an ensemble to convey a moving performance to its audi-

ence, the players must be moved first by their own musical performance. Don't expect the audience to feel something that you don't feel first.

Gift from the heart

Hanging from a shelf in my office are two dollar bills folded in fourths. Fifteen years ago, my band performed for a senior center Valentine's Day luncheon. Being the first time for this type of event, I was a little nervous about filling a 60-minute time slot. We programmed a variety of full band selections along with solos and small ensembles as well. The concert went quite well, and afterward the students mingled with the seniors and served them lunch.

One lady specifically approached me. She was quite old and feeble but stood with the aid of her walker. Hunched over with her head drooping, she motioned for me to bend down so she could talk to me. She told me how much she enjoyed the concert and that she wanted to do something special for the students. She reached into an old, tattered coin purse with her worn hands and pulled out two dollar bills neatly folded, leaving only some loose change behind. She instructed me to

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Remembering

James A. Sjolund: April 21, 1932-June 11, 2014

WMEA Hall of Fame member Jim Sjolund died in June in Oregon. He is remembered for his high energy, creative thinking, wit and intelligence, and love of his family. He was a son, brother, husband, father, naval officer, teacher, grandfather, and friend who was constantly thinking of his next project or adventure. He loved being in the U.S. Navy, teaching, fishing, real estate, flying airplanes, owning a boat, breeding and showing Arabian horses, running a summer camp with two teacher friends and traveling to new places to explore. His lifelong hobby was owning cars and then trying out the next model, but he couldn't tell you how many cars he had since college!

Born in Custer, Washington, Jim was the oldest son of eight children. He attended Ferndale High School, then went to Western Washington State College, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts and a master's degree in music education.

He served as a naval officer during the Korean War.

He taught music in the Shoreline School District for several years before moving to Olympia to become the State Supervisor of Music. His projects took him to Washington, D.C., for a year to write grants establishing the National Arts for the Handicapped. Another was spending a year on Orcas Island administering the Arts for the Rural School District program.

Upon retiring he loved to explore the Southwest with his wife, finally settling in Gold Canyon, Arizona, for 10 years before returning to the Pacific Northwest to live in Wilsonville, Oregon. He married Marilyn Walter after college and shared 59 great years, raising three children. He loved watching his eight grandchildren and two great-grandsons grow up and participating in their activities.

A celebration of his life was held in Olympia on July 27, 2014, at the Indian Summer Golf and Country Club in Olympia.

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buy a treat for the kids, as if a grandmother were treating her grandchild. She gazed at the 50+ kids meandering about the room, then looked down at the two dollars, and suddenly realized the math didn't add up. She felt as if her gift was inadequate to buy anything for so many but insisted I take the money. I have never forgotten her lesson of generosity. What was it that caused her to be so moved that she felt compelled to give a gift? I would like to think it was a high level of musical achievement, but that probably didn't even play a role that day. Perhaps she was just moved by the sincerity of young adolescents sharing their gift of music.

As I come to the end of this article, I struggle with the fact that I haven't generated a concise answer to the question, "What makes a moving performance?" Maybe it's not important to be able to explain why, maybe it's enough just to know that a musical performance contains the potential to move our audience. Ray Cramer is our band headliner at the Northwest Conference. I'll ask him—he knows everything.

date and realize that I only have a little over a month left as a student teacher. It feels like just yesterday I was anxiously waiting to hear where I had been placed for my student teaching assignment. Since my sophomore year, I had wanted to be placed at Bellarmine. Frank Lewis is very well-recognized as both a choral and instrumental director, something that appealed to me as a dual-endorsed choir/orchestral major: Over three years I took every opportunity to introduce myself to him at every WMEA/ NW Conference. I always took the opportunity to sign up to volunteer as his student guide whenever his orchestra came to PLU's Invitational. When I finally received word that I had been placed to work alongside him at Bellarmine, I was overjoyed. Teaching cooperatively with him has been absolutely everything I could have asked for and more. Working for the last three months alongside him in the classroom has provided valuable clarity of the reality of what my job as a teacher will be. Frank has been my own personal cheerleader, helping me to stay positive whenever I feel stressed or frustrated with

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the room a less sterile feeling and are reminders to not only sing well but also to keep things light. After all, music is fun! I have some windows up high in the band room and poster-sized fingering charts in the front of the room. I have also collections of other posters and sayings that refer both to technique and to the fun that music can be. The most popular posters with my students are those from Tone Deaf Comics (including "The Wizarding Spells of Band Director") and those showing the anatomy of an instrument. It also makes the classroom an interesting place for the music students' friends to visit.

The bottom line...

For a long time in my career, I did not bother with the look of my office, podium and classroom. It seemed to be effort I did not want to put out. I do not know when that changed for me, but I am glad it did. I like being in each space, and I like the way students react to the spaces. To each his own, but I have found it rewarding to make the spaces I share with my students fun places to explore, and great places to learn about music.

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myself if something does not go as planned. Under his guidance, I have begun the process of solidifying my own teaching style. He has given me the freedom to explore and experiment with different ideas and processes to teach concepts, even if they are different than his personal preferences.

I am saddened that I will soon be leaving Bellarmine, because I will miss being challenged every day to constantly improve myself. In short, I feel very blessed to have had the opportunity to learn and work from him these last few months and look forward to soon becoming a professional colleague.



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