

## If You PLAY Something, SAY Something!

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### Music as a Language

*"It's rare that I ever meet a musician who doesn't agree that music is a language. But it's very rare to meet a musician that really treats it like one."*

–Victor Wooten – Bela Fleck and the Flecktones

### Elements of Music

- Understanding
- Communication / Delivery
- Expression / Emotion
- Phrasing
- Body Language

### STAGES OF MUSICIANSHIP (in performance AND rehearsal)

#### Stage 1: Hollow Musicianship

- Lack of attention to basic musical markings
  - tempo changes (*ritardando, accelerando, morendo, subito, sans*)
  - dynamics
  - articulation
  - phrase markings
  - understanding of style and its role in the music
- Often the first stage of rehearsal with the excuse that “we will focus on notes and rhythms first, THEN get into the music”
  - Inherent problem with this approach is that students get good at what they practice (in this case, get good at playing without musicality)
  - Important to realize we can still rehearse a group technically, but important to provide musical justification while fixing technical issues.
  - Ensembles often not aware of the program notes / reason behind the composition of a piece. Makes them unable to identify with the music. If students “practice music” without contextual understanding, they get good at what they practice!

#### Stage 2: Choreographed Musicianship

- Observation and basic execution of musical markings / terms
- While musical intent is there, performance seems hollow because the *reason* for the musical markings is not being understood nor conveyed
- Often accompanied by a lack of facial expression and body language from the podium

### Stage 3: Engaged Musicianship

- When the reason for a marking is understood through score study, communicated to the ensemble, and conveyed through performance
  - Ensemble has been aware of the inspiration behind a piece and has been rehearsing with this in mind throughout the process.
  - All musical terms have corresponding emotional / “action” terms that are understood by the ensemble
  - Facial expressions / body language of conductor reflects the music

### General thoughts on phrasing

- Everything should have musical “line” (melody, supporting harmony, rhythm, sustained notes)
- Repeated notes need to have direction
- Repeated phrases need to have direction (can move upward or downward)
- Students play what they hear in their heads
- Decisions need to be made on ensemble phrasing / breathing, not just individual
- Musical breath = musical entrance

### Relating Phrasing to Speech

- Breath (always musical and in tempo)
- Letters -> Notes
- Syllables -> Intervals
- Words -> Measures
- Sentences -> Phrases
- Combination of sentences -> Complete work

### Musical graphs

- Helpful to create a graph of the emotional arc of an entire work
- Add musical terminology that appears throughout the music
- Include emotional / “action” terms that correspond with musical terminology
- Consider adding a second line that graphs dynamics

### “Action Terms”

- Attaches an emotional / physical response to a musical term
- Provides the “why” of a musical decision (no longer getting louder just because the word “crescendo” means “get louder”)

#### Select Musical terms

Ritardando  
Accelerando  
Crescendo  
Diminuendo  
piano  
forte  
sustain

#### Examples of Emotional / “Action” terms

Tension (or release) / relax / ponder  
Energy / intensity / momentum  
Push / energy transfer / engage  
Pull back / relax / calm down / (intensify)  
Gentle / calm / thoughtful  
Strong / confident / intention  
Commitment / constant / engaged

Musical Example

The first system of music is in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff begins with a melody of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bass clef staff begins with a melody of quarter notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Both staves have a dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano). The first measure of each staff has a slur over the notes. The second measure of each staff has a slur over the notes. The third measure of each staff has a slur over the notes. The system ends with a double bar line.

The second system of music is in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff begins with a melody of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bass clef staff begins with a melody of quarter notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. The treble clef staff has a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and the bass clef staff has a dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano). The first measure of each staff has a slur over the notes. The second measure of each staff has a slur over the notes. The third measure of each staff has a slur over the notes. The system ends with a double bar line.