

## Beyond “Piano Proficiency”: Creative Connections to Meaning and Motivation in Class Piano

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### Description

- creative projects, collaboratively conceived based on student interest and input
- need to be easily accessible since no computers at student pianos (older Yamaha clavino piano lab); room has single computer with internet access and a screen and projector at the front
- textbook Alfred’s Group Piano for Adults, Book 1 and 2

### Purpose

- activities to answer student question of “why” do we need piano proficiency?
- to create broad musical meaning both contemporary (to capture student interest with references to popular music) and historical (students do not have a Music History course until after they pass Piano Proficiency)
- to add a Liberal Arts component (we do not offer a BA music degree) and an Interdisciplinary perspective (UWG just created a Bachelor in Interdisciplinary Studies degree)
- to increase student motivation by experiencing a broad approach to the piano so that they can “find the best way to practice for themselves”

### Outcomes

- data has been collected but this is not a statistical research project; rather this is a creative, practical approach (what works with my student population)
- increased enthusiasm and participation in class
- increased attendance grades, increased final grades

### Real-Ideal Life Scenario

- 1 student performs on principal applied as a “guest artist”, excerpt from textbook
- classmates play appropriate piano parts
- instructor designs use of the piano for appropriate music major (education, performance, composition) in an ideal situation (concert stage, performing arts high school) and real life situation (beginning 6<sup>th</sup> grade band or choir class; class piano “guest artist” deliberately makes mistakes)
- piano used to correct pitches and tuning, transpose instruments

### Stravinsky

- famous quote: “The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one’s self”
- view youtube BALLET performances of Rite of Spring
- discuss the radical, novel nature of the music and the dance movements, yet noting that Stravinsky imposed constraints on himself
- compare to textbook improvisations that “follow a given pattern” to motivate students to understand the creative aspect of and be willing to engage with non-free improvisation

## Football

- live in region of the country where football is a huge part of the culture
- marching band students are largest number of music majors
- GP3 session by Paul Alexander who wrote Perform: A Journey for Athletes, Musicians, Coaches and Teachers (2011)
- Alexander is former coach of Cincinnati Bengals, and now Dallas Cowboys; studied piano with Albert Muhlbach at Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music (pre college division)
- early in Fall semester, during football season and to make immediate meaningful connections and to motivate students for the course, view youtube "Paul Alexander: Renaissance Man"
- discuss applications to principal applied and for spring semester Piano Proficiency piano recital (one memorized solo piece to connect to interpretive qualities of the piece)

## Synaesthesia

- research project with UWG psychology professor Dr. Christine Simmonds-Moore, examining the role of color in music
- also discuss use of color coordination for time management strategies, for highlighting different parts in choral and band scores, and musical performers (Helene Grimaud)

## Neuroscience

- students mentioned their interest in the award winning documentary "Alive Inside" which shows improvements in Alzheimer's patients' memory when listening to music from their youth
- discuss numerous studies which show that learning a musical instrument can reduce the effects of Alzheimer's disease
- discuss studies which show that through Music Therapy (discuss as possible future career) neural pathways can be rebuilt in the brains of stroke victims

## Improvisation for Fun

- instructor leads and plays the foundational part
- each student is given opportunity to solo for the entire class
- start with improvisation on black keys only which means that all notes sound correct-instructor sets the mood
- then improvisation on the textbook exercises following the chord structure, but with free rhythm-instructor sets the mood

## "Dies Irae" from Mozart's Requiem

- listen to youtube recording
- for many students it's the first time they hear an orchestra
- understand real life uses of choral score reading
- "wow" factor motivates them to want to practice choral score reading

## Lightening Talks

- optional, for bonus points
- topic of interest to the student with instructor approval
- encouraged to explore any topic related to music
- expands musical understanding beyond Piano Proficiency