

FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE - ONE DAY AT A TIME!

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Out of concern for the wellbeing of colleagues across the nation, I am honored to present this webinar to with the assistance of Nottleman Music Company of St. Louis to music educators across the nation as encouragement to stay the course, to work at being positive and effective in issues that are testing every ounce of perseverance that you have, and to focus on the future! Life changed for all of us last March when the reality of the pandemic became clear. While every situation is different and there are no easy solutions, I hope that the points I present and the questions I ask will help you reflect on how essential your role as a music educator is in the lives of your students.

Here are several questions to consider:

- How did you get to where you are today as a music educator?
- How does time management impact how we balance our daily responsibilities in these challenging times while keeping our dreams in focus?
- How has technology influenced music and society, your teaching and use of computer based or assisted resources with your students?
- Whether you are a veteran, mid-career, or young teacher, how are you seeking to make a difference as a music educator?
- Do you enjoy being a musical evangelist for your community?
- What do you believe would benefit the course of music over the next twenty years, once we are able to return to some sense of normalcy in our daily lives?

How did you get to where you are today and what made you decide to pursue a career in music?

- Was it a band, choir or orchestra director, or a private teacher?
- Do you have a Glen or Glenneta Holland to thank?
- Was it a church choir director who gave you an opportunity to sing or play?
- Was it a concert you attended or one in which you participated in high school?
- Was it a parent, friend, or a sibling who exposed you to the joy of music?
- Was it an unexpected listening experience from an album that hit you like a lightning bolt?
- And finally, now that are a professional, whose shoulders are you standing on?

For me it was a combination of things:

- It was my older brother Larry who played the trumpet in the high school band.
- It was the records he brought home from college by Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Charles Mingus, and Dave Brubeck that opened a world to me that I would have missed otherwise.
- It was Crill Higgins, my high school band director who demonstrated a deep love of music.
- It was the early conducting experiences with the high school band and church choir.
- It was the great teachers and highly talented peers that surrounded me throughout my college education.
- It was landing my first position at Furman University at the age of 24. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Like all of you, from the beginning I wanted to share the joy of music and I was dumb enough to believe that I could make a difference, I could make it better. What are some ways we can make it better for our students?

Recognizing the uniqueness of ensemble participation in school settings, music teachers have many opportunities to impact their students' lives for four to eight years. Helping students learn how to use time effectively, practice self-forgiveness, and establish a positive goal orientation NOW will directly impact their success in the future. Here are some questions to ponder.

- Do you assist your students in their attempts to maintain a balance in their academic classes, personal practice, ensemble rehearsals, and other activities?
- Do you emphasize listening to music for enjoyment, or to explore an unfamiliar style, artist, or genre? Do you take precious time to share masterpieces with them at least once weekly?
- Do you discuss how they can keep their goals alive as they prepare for the next step in school, for college, or in their thoughts about a career?
- Do you help your students discover and then pursue short, medium, and long goals in their time with you, and instill in them the desire for a higher standard of achievement?
- Do you discuss the need for personal forgiveness when a performance is lackluster or worse, or when it takes longer than it should for them to understand the difference between C7, C-7, C major 7, C diminished 7, or C altered 7 no matter how many times or ways you explain it

How have I kept everything in balance as an administrator, educator, performer, husband, father, and as someone who still delights in music? The answer is that like all of you, I WORK AT IT.

As a performer, it is a daily effort to keep practicing, to stay curious and explore new sounds, to revisit old sounds, and discover new interpretations for the familiar. I do my best to exercise and meditate, and to have an effective practice routine that emphasizes quality, pushing myself to address long-term weaknesses. This requires putting Kenny Werner's text, "Effortless Mastery," to work as acceptance and forgiveness are key to improvement. I understand the differences between addressing information, gaining knowledge, application, performance, and assessment, and continually repeating all of these steps, celebrating the small victories! Recently during a very frustrating practice, the voice said "no one said it was going to be easy."

As an educator, I have worked at preparing for each day, keeping my ears open in rehearsals, offering fair, accurate, and encouraging assessment. I work at staying current in my knowledge. I read, I study music through online resources (though I still prefer the brick & mortar experience). I seek out recordings, I look at old concert programs, and I ask for advice from colleagues across the nation. While each of us has enjoyed success, the last thing we should do especially now is to "rust on our laurels."

As an administrator, it has amounted to a daily revision and assessment of what has to be completed, dealing with a multiplicity of short, medium, and long-range issues, personalities, and opportunities, as well as problems that are easy, difficult, or sometimes impossible to solve. And yet I have enjoyed administrative work – it is very satisfying when something I have done helps things to get better. You see I remain hopeful that I can "make a difference" in someone's life. In all of these areas, time management is essential and I also make use of the PARETO Principle, which you should also explore!

Let's look at the impact of technology on music and our society:

We live in a world of the cloud, I-Pads, digital downloads, scanners, auxiliary drives with ever increasing storage capacity, smart phones with video cameras and recorders, interactive video games on the net, smaller, faster and smarter tablets, digital tuners and metronomes online for free, audio samples, portable laser printers, electronic transposing practice loops, LPs/CDs/DVDs (remember those?), Smart Music, virtual reality practice rooms with instant recording and playback, interactive online instructional programs, MIDI keyboards, music software notation from simple to sophisticated, desk-top publishing, cross platform programs, video conferencing (where would we be without ZOOM?), blue tooth, power-point, long distance learning, YouTube, Spotify and other platforms.. What about satellite radio, streaming television, instant news, information, and weather, Email, fax, texting, search engines that deliver thousands of hits in a mini-second via the World Wide Web? Much of this did not exist in 1983, 1993, or 2003, and none in 1973 when I began teaching, and now **it is ALL part of our daily educational arsenal.** It is for you to decide how to make the best use of technology for your students in this time of in-person, hybrid, or online/streaming instruction.

- Regardless of their sophistication, our students will use and master these and other tools as technology impacts the arts and society in general. They EXPECT to use technology.
- We as music educators have to confront constant technological advances, getting out of our comfort zones, asking for help sooner than later. While not everything technological represents an improvement, knowing what works and being open to change is essential.
- We have to become better at self-improvement and understanding the machinations of the music education industry, or our careers could stall or fail, regardless of our talent.
- We have to confront internal and external chauvinism regarding various musical styles in our teaching which may appear when we are exhausted.
- Students do not listen to music the way we do. The number one provider is YouTube, followed by Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, and other online sources, generally experienced through ear buds or headphones instead of Advent speakers. While this has democratized the listening experience, it has also created sheltered environments which may reinforce a sameness of style preferences. Especially now, you can provide your students with an outstanding listening experience, introducing a cornucopia of new sounds and cultures!
- We have to work at being positive without guilt when our efforts with our students are inadequate in helping them cope with “the new normal.” This time provides opportunities to demonstrate to our students what music means to us at the deepest level and how it can help everyone deal with all kind of issues.
- More so than ever, we have to work at maintaining friendships, caring for our family, our spiritual life, happiness, and financial security. Our students need to know that we are fully human and not just music teaching automatons.

Here are two very dangerous questions: 1) How does one made a difference? 2) Are we as music educators making a difference as music evangelists?

If I have made a difference, it is because I have done my best to repay the countless kindnesses extended to me by the master teachers and performers with whom I have had the opportunity to work. I have sought to share the knowledge, experiences, and musical joy that they unselfishly gave

to me. I have promoted music as a healing and unifying force, and I have encouraged my students as my wonderful masters encouraged me.

Is making a difference in someone's life easy? Heavens no! Each of us knows that it is highly risky to invest in someone who may turn out to be the biggest disappointment imaginable, though luckily that experience is very rare. It is also risky to devote one's life to presenting music that requires the performers and the listeners to THINK!

When I was a college freshman, I wrote to trumpeter/composer Don Ellis asking his advice on whether or not I should pursue a career in music. Fortunately he replied and said that like me, he had confronted whether or not to continue following his dream of being a musician. He made the commitment to stay the course as he decided it would be better to fail after giving it everything he had instead of doing something else with his life and being successful – because there would always be the big question. *Could I have made it?* And then he asked me **“What do you really want to do?”** and he urged me to be faithful in my journey! As some of you are confronting this in the midst of the pandemic, please know that YOU ARE NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER!

Thanks to the influence of teachers, performers, colleagues, and my family, I am more enthusiastic than ever about discovering and sharing the joy of music. My standards for my students and myself remain high, and yet my patience has also increased. I understand more about what it means to be a 'professional.' I have had countless unexpected experiences that convince me that I made the right choice in pursuing music, especially thanks to my travels to Poland and China as a teacher and performer, and the success so many of my former students have enjoyed!

As music educators we are **music evangelists**, presenting music that will make a difference in the lives of our students and our audiences. It is our responsibility to help everyone develop an appreciation for or an awareness of music that is marginalized in advertising, visibility and commercial availability. Your enthusiastically speaking to your students and audiences about the power of music in times like these will open fresh horizons to them and relieve some of the stress they are enduring.

What else can we do to help our students now and in the future?

- Emphasize more joy in the presentation, rehearsing, and performance of music.
- Take a clear stand for quality over quantity at all levels.
- Emphasize less competition and much more cooperation with each other.
- Seek to eliminate chauvinism and elitism in what is “good music.”
- Encourage students to become musicians who are devoted to sharing the joy of music with those who need it most.

What personal advice would I give to you in your everyday activities?

- Stay connected! Reach out to colleagues who you respect and trust. Find out how they are coping with their realities and help each other!
- Learn to forgive yourself when you fail, as guilt is the most plentiful, cheap, and worthless commodity, while self-acceptance, forgiveness, and goal orientation are rare gifts.
- Take time – if only for 15 minutes at a time – to listen in solitude to music that you love!
- Constant busyness and procrastination damage or overwhelm productivity.
- Take a break, refresh yourself from unrelenting activity and the “I must” syndrome....as you MUST be good to yourself in order to be good for others.
- Love your students and be kind, there is enough stress without us making it worse.

- Do not “rust on your laurels.” Bloom where you are planted, but know when to uproot and replant yourself.
- Be patient and forgiving, but always be clear and concise in your expectations.
- Be honest, but never stomp on other people’s dreams.
- Be available, keep your door and your heart open. You never know what miracle might occur.
- Be goal oriented for your sake and for your students, and those with whom you work.
- Regularly assess your musicianship and stay curious! You can always make progress...and “progress is a scary thing.”
- Enjoy mundane rehearsals and concerts, look for the new in the old, the special in the boring, and the unexpected in the familiar. Never lose the SURPRISE FACTOR!
- **II:** Listen, Practice, Research, Experiment (the “why not factor”), Apply, Evaluate, Discuss, Master – take nothing for granted :II
- Eliminate musical chauvinism, but maintain standards for yourself and your students.
- Totally eliminate the word “try” from your vocabulary.
- Realize what a **BLESSING** you have been given to be a music educator, or an orchestral performer, an accompanist, a jazz musician, a research musicologist, a music librarian, a video game composer, an opera singer, an anonymous member of a touring backup band, a music industry representative, a conductor of a service band, a recording engineer, a church musician, a music therapist working with Alzheimer’s patients, or the director of a college music department.
- Finally – I would tell your students to pray that they will be a BLESSING to others, as they have been blessed by you. That is how it all keeps going.

Best wishes to you and your students as you become musicians making a crucial difference in how we get through these troubled times together. We’re all in this together! Thank you.

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