



*About
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During thirty-one years at Rowan, Bert has taught violin, viola, chamber music, Music History and Appreciation, counterpoint, orchestration, and courses in the humanities. He has also conducted the orchestra, band, and the Opera Company. For most of two decades, he was the violinist of the Pro Arte Trio, a faculty ensemble which performed throughout the Eastern states and in Europe. He has been a member of the Philadelphia Opera Company and Pennsylvania Ballet, and is presently concertmaster of the Reading Symphony.

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Developing Creativity in Performance and in Teaching



Bertram Greenspan

Some years ago I was in a group of educators who heard their CEO urge them to evaluate their creativity in teaching. This directive was received with an undercurrent of discomfort and derision. The assembly of artists, actors, directors, and musicians hardly needed an administrator to tell them to be creative. One brave soul whispered loudly enough for most to hear, "You either have it or you don't." Another muttered, "You can't teach it."

Therefore, it was with considerable apprehension that I consented to an invitation to submit an article about "creativity." I wondered who would read this article. Don't most people (particularly those with education) believe that they are creative? Can it be taught? And, what is it?

After much introspection, I realized that my life has been consumed with concerns about creativity. Consumed? Haunted or plagued might be a more accurate description of my experience. Is this hyperbole? No! My entire education has stressed the supposition that the greatest professional shortcoming is to *bore* other people.

Imagination must somehow be harnessed to skill and knowledge to engage and sustain other people's interest. It follows

that creativity consists of doing something extraordinary, something beyond the usual. It can result in something tangible, such as a picture or a musical composition. It can be a method of working. It can result in a solution to a problem. Perhaps a combination of all these statements gives us a workable definition: Creativity is solving a problem (or problems) in an unusually special manner. This is fairly close to a dictionary definition: "Creativity is artistic or intellectual inventiveness." (Webster's, Simon and Schuster)

How does one go about "being creative"? The very thought can be intimidating! In fact, I have seen people who are asked to be creative become overwhelmed. They become inhibited and even more prosaic and ordinary. I have had to create workable methods of developing creativity in others as well as within myself. My plan for this paper will be first to discuss some problems in developing creativity in performance. This will be followed by a brief discussion of creativity in teaching.

As a performer, my first goal is to gain total control of my skills and to have complete knowledge and understanding of the musical score. The creative aspects of my work only materialize fully through learning to control my mind and physical motions. Philosophers have succinctly summarized the process: Discipline is necessary to attain freedom.

It follows that one of the main problems results when one becomes so preoccupied with discipline that creativity is totally stifled. But how does one learn to be creative with little or with limited discipline?

Before dealing with this question, I should state my belief that the creative goals for a performer are as follows:

1. to engage the listener's attention, 2. to maintain the listener's interest, and, 3. to achieve the above through accurately rendering the composer's intentions as one understands them.

This includes rendering the music in the correct style for the historical period and creating something of beauty from the standpoint of tone, tempo, articulation, and dynamics.

The teacher's concerns are the same as one and two above, while guiding the student to greater knowledge, thinking ability, and communication skills. Business people engaged in advertising and marketing have related goals, as do individuals in many other occupations.

Regarding the problem of being creative with limited discipline, I believe that an artist can and must be creative with one note, one line, one color, or one word. In music, the variables of intonation, timbre or quality, intensity or volume, attack and release, and vibrato or lack of it create a variety of possibilities. When we add together 10, 12, or 16 notes and create a phrase, the creative possibilities increase significantly. Which note is most important? Should the phrase increase in intensity or diminish? Which of the above variables shall we use to attain our goal? As each variable is a continuum of possibilities, the range of choices is immense.

If one were to diagram a series of possibilities for a note of two-counts' duration in a slow tempo (whole note = 60), it might appear as follows:



(The vertical lines represent beats. Each bar represents a note. The height increases or diminishes with intensity of dynamics. Each of the variables mentioned above can be diagrammed similarly.)

An instrumental student of modest ability and confidence can be encouraged to experiment with one note. The ultimate choice the student makes will determine the shape of adjacent notes. With sufficient reinforcement and encour-

agement, the student will be able to take risks and discover his or her own creativity.

Regardless of a person's level of development, an artistic or intellectual problem can be simplified. It can be reduced to its lowest common denominator. One can study the tree before studying the forest. If the tree is too complicated, a leaf or a root can be considered. Then, like a builder, the individual can assemble the pieces and build the concept.

In summary, I recommend that an individual simplify and isolate elements of the whole, develop creative expression in each element, combine elements gradually until unity is achieved, and develop creativity simultaneously with the development of skill.

Someone may comment that a lifetime is not long enough for all of that. Fortunately, knowledge is transferable. Patience in developing expressive qualities in one note will be rewarded by improvement in thousands of subsequent notes.

One of my most vivid memories of a learning experience is a violin lesson with Daniel Guilet, a virtuoso French artist. We spent close to one hour studying one phrase of music. The performance length of this phrase was approximately ten seconds. My execution was repeatedly of insufficient interest to him. We explored the variables. After I had improved the execution of the phrase, he began to shout, as I was performing, "*Créez! Créez! Créez!*" Each command to "create" became more intense and menacing. His subsequent comments gradually clarified his message: "Abandon your inhibitions! Take risks! Risk making mistakes! Risk exaggeration! Create something of beauty!"

The lesson learned from this experience was frightening.

Acquiring the requisite knowledge and discipline to perform the task is insufficient. One must have the courage to harness the discipline to the excitement of one's imagination and creative spirit. One must risk unveiling the ruminations of the psyche.

The methodology revealed in the above anecdote is simple. Provide some information or choices and ask a question.

Each individual, presented with choices, has the ability to enlist his or her own imagination to make a creative decision.

Another important lesson learned from Guilet was that the high points must be chosen carefully. If everything is intense, no particular aspect is unique. Something must be unusual. The entire structure must prepare the special moments.

Regarding educational methodology, I will state my conviction that teaching a class is, in many respects, a performance. If the students are bored, concentration is lost, and the climate for learning is diminished.

My introduction to a music class often proceeds as follows. The students are asked to listen carefully to a brief presentation; in a few minutes, they will be required to write a paragraph for evaluation. The prospect of evaluation engages their attention. The material I present for five to ten minutes is often a summary of material recently assigned. I then provide a question to be answered in one paragraph. In some instances, I follow that by reading some answers to the class, without identifying the writers.

These answers engender class discussion and provide a transition to further lecture, question, and discussion. If someone provides an unusually creative answer, I praise the writer enthusiastically.

Frequently, my opening presentation consists of reading a paragraph from a recent newspaper or magazine. Occasionally, a television or radio program provides engaging material. The object is to maintain the students' interest by relating the subject matter to issues of current interest.

During the 1991-92 academic year, the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill hearings provided ample material for a Humanities class discussion of the writings of Virginia Woolf and others. The question of sexual harassment was just one of the issues. The problem of how to determine truth, or whether it is possible to determine truth, consumed students' discussion.

The Gulf War provided a basis for comparing Saddam Hussein's actions to the recommendations of Machiavelli in *The Prince*. The class evaluated newspaper reports of President Bush's statements and actions in relation to ideas expressed in Machiavelli and in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Antigone's agony over Creon's edict that her brother could not be buried was related to Imelda Marcos' attempts to have her husband buried in the Philippines. The location of Lenin's tomb near the Kremlin and reports that his body might be moved provided interesting questions about Nigerian rituals and beliefs of the Ibo tribe in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

In music classes, the opening three-to-five minute presentation is often the recorded performance of an assigned composition. The ensuing discussion reveals to the instructor—and most importantly to the students—a variety of perception levels. It is one thing for the instructor to say, "You should have heard this instrument or that motive." It is quite another matter when students realize that their peers are perceiving things that were missed entirely by themselves.

If the students are challenged for a response to an imaginative question, they might provide creative answers. For example, the standard question for listening analysis is, "Who wrote this? Substantiate your answer." A more imaginative approach might be to ask, "Why might this have been written by Schumann rather than Beethoven?" Or, "Which one of the following two works was written in the eighteenth century?" Or, "Why could this composition not have been written by Mozart?"

Occasionally a student will perceive a creative relationship between motives, a section of the structure, and so on. These special contributions of creative individuals must be strongly encouraged and praised in private as well as in class. The negative influence of philistine bullies and their whispered sarcasms must be diminished at every opportunity!

Seriously, the creative thinker often has social problems. To be creative means to risk being different from the group.

Being creative, the student might develop solutions or perceptions that even supersede those of the instructor! May we all have the insight and self-confidence to praise such individuals!

In conclusion, challenging the students' perceptions and ability to think at the very outset of class engages their attention. Setting the stage for students to communicate through written or oral responses sustains their attention and can elicit creative responses. Breaking the class period into varied segments can help also to sustain interest. Hopefully, these activities will motivate students to prepare adequately for the challenges of the next class.