

## **Ithaca College/CBDNA Conference on Instrumental Music Education.**

June 29- July 1, 2014

### **Summary**

Mark Fonder welcomed us and provided initial introductions. He shared a brief history about this conference and reminded us about its purpose. Mark said,

In 2010, the CBDNA decided to re-focus on one of its founding principles: that of supporting instrumental music education in the elementary and secondary schools. The first conference was held at the University of Minnesota and the focus was on mentoring new teachers while in their first or second year of public school teaching. The second conference, held at Arizona State University in 2012, began expanding the definition of instrumental music education beyond the large ensemble and band membership to include teaching nontraditional instrumental ensembles in the schools.

Welcome to Ithaca College and the third of three CBDNA-sponsored conferences. Like the two previous conferences, CBDNA remains committed to its principle of strengthening and supporting instrumental music education in the schools. However, this conference has a unique mission. The purpose of this conference is to examine the role of the college and university conductor in the preparation of the future instrumental music teacher.

We acknowledge that sometimes there is a lack of coordination in the preparation of future instrumental music educators in higher education. The music education faculty might perceive the applied faculty approach as fossilized while the conductors might see the music educators approach as lacking artistry.

Over the next two days, we have an agenda filled with exciting topics and presentations given by some of our professions best minds. Concluding each day will be a panel presentation that promises to be provocative, perhaps controversial, but always aimed toward assisting in preparing the instrumental music teachers in bringing the highest quality music experiences to their students.

Karl Paulnack, Dean of the School of Music at Ithaca College, provided the keynote address. He acknowledged the purpose of this conference was to address two somewhat separate approaches to music education, and implored us to find common ground. At the core of what any of us do in music – is music itself – beauty, art, and what it means to be fully human. Karl cited brain research and how music is used to help heal stroke victims. According to Karl, the four areas that impact brain development, include music, exercise, play, and a numinous (transcendent/spiritual) experience. By focusing on what we know about the human brain and how music stimulates the human brain, perhaps we can appreciate the many ways in which music can be experienced and taught.

Carolyn Barber was the first presenter on Monday morning. Her presentation, entitled *Ensembleship for the 21st Century Artist Teacher* challenged us to find ways to go beyond the conductor as all knowing by engaging our ensemble members in projects based on our repertoire. Carolyns college wind ensemble students work together in sectionals and other pre-arranged small groups to improvise, share interpretations, and build ensemble trust. Each project (approx. one or two per semester depending on the literature) is based on repertoire and deals with some aspect of musicianship or ensemble performance that Carolyn or the students feel needs improvement. Students might be asked to work on articulation, intonation and style for one

project. Another project included watching a video and then selecting a musical interpretation. All circle games or projects were directly linked to repertoire being studied in wind ensemble rehearsals. While Carolyn might be present to videotape the musical circles, her role is not to tell the students what to do; she observes and guides once the project has been assigned.

Doug Orzolek presented a session about assessment trends in music education. Doug's focus was on past assessment methods as well as future and included the myriad ways in which teachers are assessed and required to assess student learning. Using excerpts from band repertoire, Doug shared specific ways in which we can engage students in music making so that our end goal can be reached: independent music makers (students who love music). Doug reminded us that assessment is not simply a grade given at the end of a semester and that grade should certainly not be based on a student's attitude or attendance. Rather, assessment is an ongoing part of the learning process and should be used to determine what a student has learned, and is learning. Interestingly, both Carolyn and Chris Azzara used the tune Simple Gifts (Carolyn was working on Copland's Variations on a Shaker Melody in her rehearsals) to demonstrate possibilities for improvising in the band room setting. Chris took participants through his seven-step process of improvisation after asking participants to take the oath of there are no mistakes in improvisation, every wrong note is just a half step away from a right note and, if you play something that doesn't sound right, you are either really cool or you just don't get it yet.

Brian Diller, DM Candidate in Conducting from Cincinnati Conservatory, was selected as one of three paper presenters for the conference. Brian shared his experiences as a high school band director who was committed to creating a valuable chamber music program at the high school level. Brian shared recordings of his ensembles and even provided live musicians performing without a conductor. Brian's session, Beyond the Band: A Model for Incorporating Conducted Chamber Music into the School Music Program. Strategies, Repertoire, and Materials looked at how to incorporate chamber music into a program without it being relegated to only preparation for solo and ensemble contest.

Each afternoon session was devoted to a rehearsal lab. On our first afternoon, 40 members of the Ithaca High School Concert Band were present to serve as a lab ensemble for four different student or first-year teachers. Our intent was for each young teacher to rehearse the Ithaca Band for 20-25 minutes while participants watched master teachers work with the young teacher. We were hoping to see the process of teaching rehearsal techniques, and rehearsal pacing. Each mentor teacher used a slightly different approach with each young teacher. Director of Bands at Ithaca High School, Nicki Zawel worked with Grace Demerath on Frank Ticheli's setting of Amazing Grace. Grace has had limited large ensemble experience so kudos to her for having the courage to not only step in front of a high school band that she didn't know, but also to allow 60 conductors to watch! Nicki's approach with Grace began with the positive things Grace was doing and then she focused on conducting technique and facial expression. Nicki asked Grace to listen carefully and also to tell the students why she wanted them to do something. Director of Bands at Eden Prairie High School in Minnesota, Liz Jackson, worked with Kelsey Melvin on Grainger's Ye Banks and Braes O Bonnie Doon. Liz asked Kelsey to think more about the expression and meaning behind the piece. She encouraged Kelsey to ask the students questions and engage them in the rehearsal process.

Mitch Robinson, Associate Professor and Chair of Music Education at Michigan State University, worked with Erika St. Denis. Erika graduated from Ithaca College one year ago and has spent the year substitute teaching in both music and other subject areas. Erika's presence on the podium was commanding and energetic. Mitch let her work on her own for a bit before

stopping her. He told the group that he had spoken to Erika before the rehearsal (just as he would have if he was in a real mentoring situation) and asked her what she wanted him to look for in her rehearsal. She asked him to pay special attention to her rehearsal pacing. The ensemble was playing the second movement of Tichelis Cajun Folk Songs and having some trouble lining up ensemble entrances (internal pulse) after sustained notes. Mitch shared his approach to working with student teachers and commended Erika on her fast pace, while offering suggestions for future rehearsals.

Craig Kirchhoff, Director of Bands at the University of Minnesota, worked with our final young teacher, Mike Reinemann. Mike, like Erika, graduated one year ago and has spent the last year as the band director of a high school near Springfield, Massachusetts. Mike had prepared the third movement (Rondo) of the Malcolm Arnold, Prelude, Siciliano and Rondo. Mike's pacing was extremely quick – in fact, Craig asked him to slow down and work to be less frantic. Craig wanted Mike to focus on elements of balance revealing an understanding of who had the primary and secondary lines.

Interestingly, all this took place in front of Frank Battisti who was the Director of Bands of the Ithaca High School band from 1955-1967. It was wonderful to have him in the same room with members of the high school band and their current director, Nicki Zewel. During the post rehearsal Q and A session, Frank said, every rehearsal needs to have a eureka moment and that can only happen if the director is extremely well prepared with a rehearsal plan backed up by extensive score study.

After the rehearsal lab, we were treated to information about Cindi Johnston Turners research with Google Glass. Cindi and her graduate assistant, Tyler Ehrlich, talked about the various projects they have been working on during the past year, including the new composition for glass entitled, Edward. From using Glass to project her view of the score on a screen during a concert to using Glass to immediately send video clips to conducting students after class, participants learned about how Glass might transform the way in which we do things. Cindi also organized a performance of Edward which was written for four performers wearing Glass including drum set, conductor, prepared piano and bass clarinet.

Before dinner, Mark Skaba, Phd. candidate from Rutgers University and a music educator from Nanuet Schools in New York, read his paper entitled, The Incomparable Organ of Instruction: Teaching and Learning Within the Band Tradition. Mark's premise is based on writings by Dewey, and Allsup, and explores the role of the band experience in the public school. Mark writes, The band teacher sage approaches his craft as musician and teacher with care—care for musical creation, care for the spaces of learning those musical experiences support, and care for the individuals whose living experience become a part of his own.

After dinner, the first three questions of the six core conference questions were answered and discussed by the following panelists: Craig Kirchhoff, Bob Duke and Evan Tobias. The questions are as follows:

1. In your view, what is the role of the college ensemble director in the preparation of the future public school instrumental music teacher?
2. If we ourselves have not been prepared to teach outside of the traditional band and orchestra model, what can we do to help prepare our music education majors to do so?
- 3a. What experiences and processes occurring now within the curriculum of the instrumental music director could be diminished or perhaps replaced in order to more fully enhance their students music education?

Each panelist answered his question in depth and the other panelists were invited to comment before conference participants were invited to comment or ask additional questions.

By the second morning, Liz Jackson summarized the core debate of the conference and posted this on Facebook:

Ok - the big controversy at this conference is does the large ensemble performance experience deserve to continue as a vehicle for teaching music in the schools? Or should we be devising other methodologies for instruction that are less antiquated and can reach a higher percentage of the student body? There are definitely two camps here, and the debate is on. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Liz's post immediately received many thoughtful and provocative responses which can be viewed on the newly-created conference Facebook page. Please visit the Facebook page and add your own comments: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ithacacbdna>.

William Bauer began the second day by sharing his thoughts and many valuable resources regarding technology in instrumental music education. Bill cited several specific ways in which directors can utilize technology to teach comprehensively in the band rehearsal. Providing a brief history that included the CMP Wisconsin model, Bill shared methods that combine technology with comprehensive teaching in the rehearsal room.

Based on her personal experience in Venezuela, Cassie Sulbaran, presented an overview of El Sistema in Venezuela and the United States. El Sistema is completely funded by the Venezuelan government but Cassie shared methods and resources for how programs in the U.S. could flourish. Pedagogically, all students including the very youngest beginners, are exposed to orchestral literature from the start. The idea in this method is that the instrumentalist may only be able to sit and listen during the first few months, but gradually they will be able to play and participate more fully as repertoire is repeated.

Brian Shelton and Alexa Yunes presented information on how to teach and motivate diverse populations in the music program. Alexa suggested that directors need to learn and understand cultural values that may determine program success. For example, in the Latino community, where family time is valued, it works well to create performance opportunities that include entire families. Alexa suggested that simply requiring a student from the Latino community to perform in a concert, may not be a reasonable expectation. But, asking the band to perform at a festival with other family-centered activities might be more successful.

During a roundtable lunch break, participants visited in small groups. Some talked about the conference presentations and others caught up socially. Participants were invited to join the Facebook discussion.

After lunch, Larry Livingston rehearsed the Northeast Wind Conducting Symposium Wind Ensemble on Bachs, Fantasia in G. Pointing out extra musical meaning in the scale passages, the Golden Section and the Fibonacci series, Larry's rehearsal was engaging, passionate and interactive. As participants looked on, Larry questioned the players about dissonance, suspensions, tension and release in his attempt to get the players to play with more passion, expression and musical sensitivity. Larry talked about the power of music as a vehicle to define who you are and that music expresses the ache in humanity.

Scott Shuler unveiled the newly revised National Standards for Music Education that include creating, performing and responding to music. Suggesting that the traditional ensembles including band are somewhat antiquated and only include 15% of the secondary school population (on average), he then advocated for more non-traditional approaches to music making in an effort to get more students to participate in music.

After dinner, the Scott Shuler, Larry Livingston and Frank Battisti responded to the final three core conference questions:

3b. What experiences and processes could be added to the curriculum of the instrumental music teacher in order to more fully enhance their students music education?

4. At every level, from major symphony orchestras to school bands, there are challenges to maintain cultural and social relevance. Discuss the balance you would seek between preserving our history and traditions on the one hand and becoming more culturally and socially relevant on the other.

5. What recommendations do you have to bring together all the stakeholders (collegiate and public school ensemble conductors, teacher educators, researchers, community members) toward the achievement of a musically educated society?

The Ithaca Conference on Instrumental Music Education concluded with many great ideas shared, discussed and bantered about. While each attendee will ultimately take from it what they will, the overall feeling was that change is inevitable – we each need to reflect on how we are doing things both in the ensemble room and in academia – in order to provide the best, most musical and relevant experience for our future music teachers.

This report, respectfully submitted by Beth Peterson