

DR. NANCY HILL ELTON
HEART AND SOUL

I love teaching. Perhaps I inherited some of that affection from my teachers whom I know also loved it. My teaching is based on many things: it is a combination of all that I have been taught as well as an assimilation of my own concepts; it involves tested methods and musical thoughts based on many successes and some failures; and it is an amalgamation of knowledge, hard work and an optimistic spirit that stems from my own intrinsic musical desires and instincts. The motivating factor for me is my love for the music, and I have a passionate desire to share my knowledge of the great repertoire with others.

I think one of the most important qualities a teacher can possess is that of staying in touch as much as possible with the individuality and the natural musical instincts of each student. My teacher, John Perry, recently made the following statement in a lecture: "Learning in this field is a constant synthesis of what we have learned, but it only works if somehow we can keep in touch with the primitive desires and the primitive feelings that we had when we were attracted to music in the first place". I think it is important that we as teachers, in our endeavors to develop the talents of our students, find a way to not lose sight of each student's unique qualities.... these 'primitive desires' that initially brought them to music...I think one could call it - their heart and soul!

The great pianists that have preceded us knew the literature of the piano and were marvelously broad in the scope of their knowledge. They made themselves familiar with every phase of musical advancement and sought real musical knowledge that went far beyond a mere technical display. I believe that in order to be the best teacher and pianist that I can be, I must continually strive to broaden my musical knowledge in every area of music, and I attempt to pass this desire and passion along to my students. It is often so difficult for them to get out to hear the symphony or go to the opera or go to a chamber music concert ... but I think it is vitally important that we as teachers continue to encourage our students to attend wonderful live performances. I can think of no better way to develop their musical and aural sensitivity and broaden their musical knowledge.

I can so well remember when I was growing up, hearing certain pieces for the first time being played in the music room in my home where

my mother taught piano. What an impact that had upon my ears - but more importantly - what an impact upon my heart and soul!..... In high school when I heard Mimi's aria from *La Boheme* for the first time, and later in college when John Adams played a most incredible performance of the Schubert Sonata in Bb Major - I had NEVER heard anything like it before... and years later when I heard John Perry playing *Gaspard de la Nuit* - I was absolutely flabbergasted and completely overwhelmed! These were all moments in my life that had a monumental effect upon me, and I always think about these times and many others, as I am trying to relate to my students, and hopefully inspiring them to get to the heart of the music. I play for them as much as I can, and try to have most of the repertoire they are playing in my fingers (or large portions of it) in order to demonstrate passages for them. It sharpens their ears and the look in their faces is so rewarding. There is nothing like hearing music performed live and well! It seems self-evident, but perhaps we sometimes lose sight of the fact that the most important way to develop the musical ear is to HEAR music, especially in the young years! And to experience the many tonal colors and timbres of a great orchestra will spark the imagination of the student and hopefully lead to his attempts to find a pianistic way to develop his tonal palette and to think orchestrally at the piano.

The development of the ear can be helped along if students become involved in other musical activities such as singing, especially in a choir, or playing another instrument and participating in orchestra or band. Hearing all of these separate parts being put together as one whole is great training for understanding polyphonic music and the demands of good voice leading. Singing, in particular, is perhaps the best. (I am a little prejudiced in this area!) After all, the pianist is always striving to produce a singing tone at the piano. As we know, in all instruments except the piano, the tone can grow, but with the piano it begins to die away instantly. This is certainly one of the greatest challenges of the instrument. I am constantly demonstrating at the lessons by singing. I try to instill in my students that they should eventually be able to sing all the melodic lines - not just the main themes but all the inner voices, etc, and hear in their mind's ear, every note of the piece. Singing (or listening to great singing) is also an excellent way for the student to improve his skill for sustaining the long musical lines of phrases. They won't usually sing at lessons! But I encourage them to try it at home. It is helpful to imagine the flow of breath through the tone, and to learn to listen to the tone AFTER the key is depressed as well as the moment of contact with the key.

In conclusion, I think it is important to let students know that, even though we are constantly working in great detail in the lessons to achieve the highest artistic level within the student's ability, there are so many things that no teacher can ever hope to teach. These are the intangible qualities of the music that every student must penetrate deeper and discover for himself. To quote Leon Fleisher, "We're all in a very real sense the servants of music...we have to get outside ourselves, beyond ourselves; the artist transcends self; the artist is on a quest, a search for what the heart of music is all about."

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