

Two-Part Presentation

Part I

The Loss of Music
and Other Connections to Ourselves

Part II

Priority Pyramid

Presented by
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on
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at the Mukwonago String Academy
Mukwonago, WI

Two Part Presentation: Part I - The Loss of Music; Part II - Priority Pyramid

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Part I - The Loss of Music and Other Connections to Ourselves

Abstract

This half of the presentation is a short lecture on the current state of affairs in folk music, specifically in music education, as I have experienced it in the last several years. The idea for this topic was extracted from my experiences written about in one of my essays entitled "The 21st Century Disappearing Folk Song Culture." There has been a noticeable difference in the current generation (third millennium) of (American) students compared with the former (second millennium) in teaching or passing along folk music. Folk music, traditionally passed down orally (through speech/singing) or aurally (by ear/hearing), tends to define a particular culture or cultures and is a significant part of sustaining any one community's identity through changes, over the course of time. This portion is meant to bring an awareness to the circumstances and to the effects of folk music.

Part II - Priority Pyramid

Abstract

This portion of the presentation is more interactive, and will include an interactive demonstration of my practice concept, the Priority Pyramid. Using this concept, any piece of music can be broken down, understood, refined, and built back up again. It includes both concrete and abstract approaches to practicing and experiencing music, and is adaptable to any level of musician and learner. A diagram of the Pyramid will be provided at the session.

OUTLINE

I. Part I - The Loss of Music and Other Connections to Ourselves

- A. What is *folk/traditional music*? Merriam-Webster defines it as [music] "originating or traditional with the common people of a country or region and typically reflecting their lifestyle"

What is *popular music*? Merriam-Webster defines it as [music] with mass appeal intended to reach wider audiences, [generally for commercial reasons, as opposed to being passed orally within smaller communities].

Both are generally short, easy to digest, remember, and be a participant in.

- B. APPLICATION: Songs are to be sung, rhymes recited, and either can be used in musical or rhythmical training and can be easily passed from one generation to the next due to their simplicity. Besides as a bonding tool, these are highly regarded for teaching moments and as content for much in early childhood--the formative years in life--and musical education.

Folk/traditional and popular music examples used in instrumental, rhythm, and general music study:

Children's and Nursery Rhymes: *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star; Hot Cross Buns; Mary Had a Little Lamb; Baa Baa Black Sheep; Are You Sleeping, Brother John?; Row, Row, Row Your Boat; Patty-Cake; I'm a Little Teapot; Shortnin' Bread; Lullaby; Other Mother Goose Rhymes*

Holiday Tunes: *Jingle Bells; Deck the Halls; Dreidl Song; Auld Lang Syne; Hymns*

Patriotic Music: *Star-Spangled Banner; America, the Beautiful; God Bless America; The Battle Hymn of the Republic; The Stars and Stripes Forever; Yankee Doodle*

**Notes, something else to consider: Not every piece originated in America, as we have strong roots from Europe and many other countries. Blended music v. Original (originated where?)*

A general assumption and 'expectation' is that most children will arrive to their teachers and classrooms having much or some of this already ingrained in them, so it is easily accessible to build from and participate in once inside the learning or social environment.

- C. How and where did we learn it? Family, friends, teachers, music and classroom teachers
- D. What is (and where is it) happening now?
- E. Cause: Why do I think this is happening now?
- i. technology
 - ii. education issues in curriculum and also budget cuts
 - ii. family time/friends time
 - iv. teacher expectations and accountability; ex-/inclusivity
- F. Effect: So what is the bigger problem?
- i. dissolving culture; changing societal values
 - ii. depleting family education and togetherness
 - iii. the future/past
 - iv. lack of imagination, therefore independent or group problem-solving skills

- G. What may be the 'new' folk or popular music?
What does this mean for folklore, fairytales, fables?
- H. Who's responsible (is anyone?) Who should be (should anyone be) teaching it?
Can we do it together? What happens if we don't?

II. Part II - Priority Pyramid

Introduction to the Priority Pyramid

Teacher: *How would you build a pyramid. From the top, down, or from the bottom, up?*

Student: *From the bottom going up.*

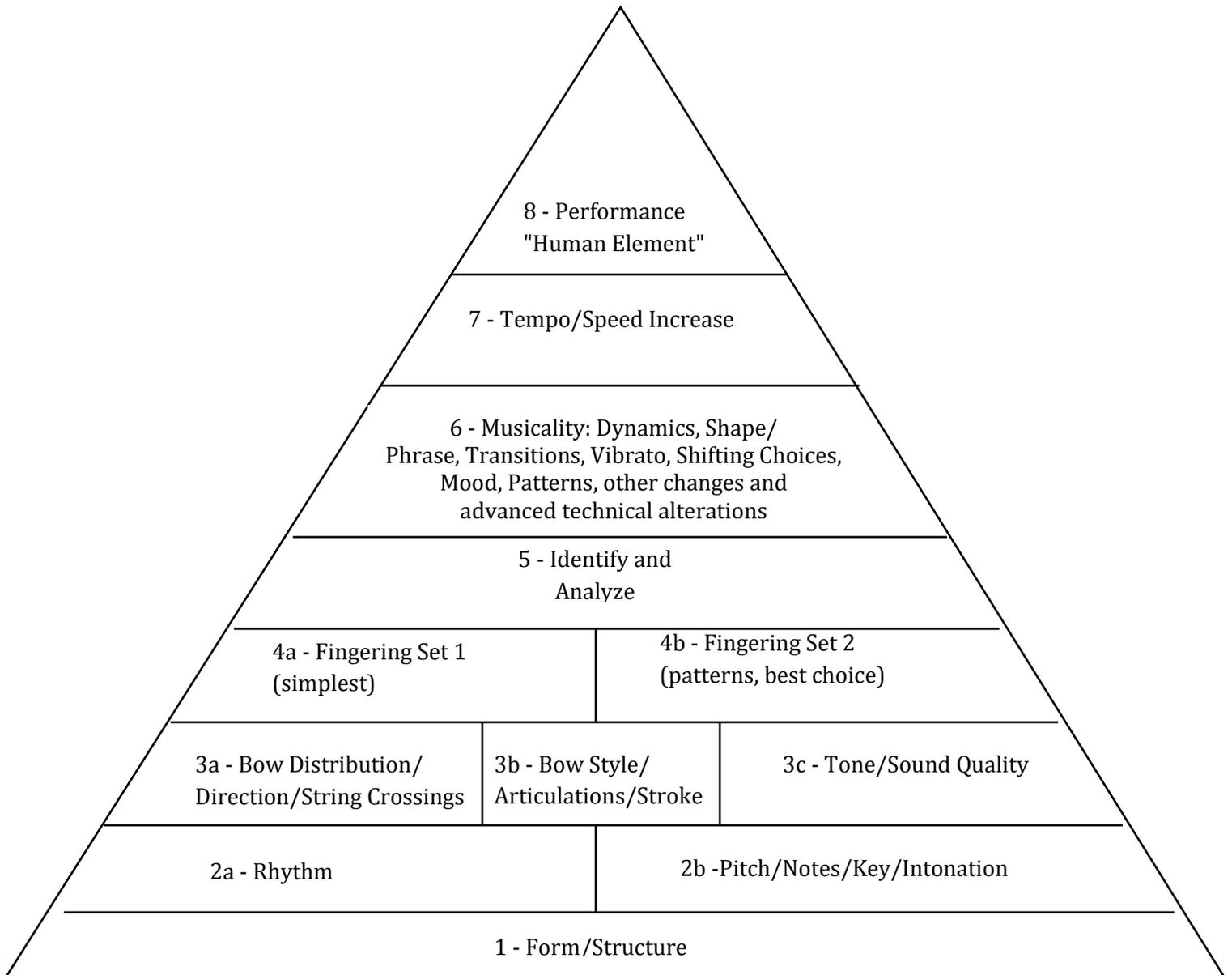
Teacher: *Of course. Otherwise there is nothing to hold up the pyramid! First you must create the structure and form which is stable, and this is a lot of hard work, and then you must build on top of it to reach your peak. If there is structural weakness, you will discover and fix it along the way before it becomes damaging to the whole.*

**Build a pyramid from the bottom up (not the reverse).*

Using the Priority Pyramid approach, both students and teacher are able to diagnose or prevent any issues in the piece or in general practice/technique by separating things and breaking them down. Students can pay better attention to exactly what they are working on in that instant, and usually with greater success. This produces a better quality practice session and they can know instantly the issues and results at each step. By spending only several minutes on each level or part, they have saved and invested in a quality practice session of for instance, 20 minutes, rather than "running through" their piece multiple times in just 5 minutes or a wasted 45 minutes, with little to no progress made and probably with bad habits included.

- A. A systematic, clear, sure-fire way to practice and approach music. The break-down process can be transferred to other tasks as well; those tasks will seem less daunting with a blue-print of how to tackle it and find, work on, and resolve problems.
- B. Isolate a problem. Analyze it. Tackle it. Resolve and improve it.
- i. Information is better understood and retained with a clear, repetitive, and thorough process. It is easy to remember and is transferable.
 - ii. Any technique on the instrument is solidified during the practice of this system, as each level focuses on specific technical goals.
 - iii. It is applicable to practically every student regardless of age, level, or ability.
 - iv. It isolates and discovers strengths and deficiencies, and develops strong musical foundation and technique.
 - v. It shows the teacher and the student the progress made and the progress yet to achieve. It can show a student how to run guided and effective practice sessions.
 - vi. It shows the student that every obstacle has multiple solutions and can be broken down to smaller pieces before tackling it.

Priority Pyramid



Instructions: Using the music, isolate each individual section of the pyramid starting from the bottom going upwards, and from left to right. Take a moderately slow tempo when doing this kind of practice in order to focus on the specific task at hand. First, work on the individual segment of the pyramid on small portions of the music until it is correct, then start to combine the sections on one level before moving to the next level. Once graduated to the next level, do the same process there, and adding the previous level to the new one. If there is a trouble spot, it will be clear at which level and which problem to diagnose and resolve, if any. It is better to break down the music in smaller segments to do this process, because more will be retained and practiced multiple times, and the accuracy will be higher. Then larger sections can be combined as well, either by repeating the entire process, or by simply piecing the parts together. I call the level with just rhythm or just pitch "Naked Notes" because the music has literally been stripped down to bare nothing at the beginning.

(continued)

Process order using each level of the pyramid from bottom to top:

1 (understanding the structure of the piece and important transition spots, etc)

2a (without pitches or on open string)

2b (without rhythm)

2a + 2b

2 + 1

3a

3b

3a + 3b

3a + 3b + 3c

3 + 2 + 1

4a

4b

4 + 3 + 2 + 1

5 (analyze the music in terms of finding arpeggios, scales, sequences, checkpoint notes, harmonies, etc; checking for comprehension and developing full understanding of the piece/theory)

5 + 4, etc...

6 (adding interpretive elements)

6 + 5, etc...

7 (finding goal tempi, slowly increasing speed with more practice and combining of larger sections)

8 (final layer is the performance product and bringing the music to life for the student, teacher, and preparing for an audience)

An article on the Priority Pyramid was published in the Newsletter of the Nebraska Chapter of the American String Teachers Association: "Stringing Along" in Spring 2014.

MATERIALS USED: TBD

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/folk>

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/popular>

JoAnna Cochenet is a conductor, clinician, educator, and performing artist, and an Artist Faculty at the Omaha Conservatory of Music (OCM) in Nebraska. An avid conductor and violist, she is frequently called to guest conduct youth and community groups and perform with ensembles such as the Omaha Symphony, Orchestra Omaha, local string quartets, touring groups, and the education-driven chamber group, the Rangbrook Ensemble. Cochenet holds a M.M. in Viola Performance and Orchestral Conducting from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she was a Graduate Assistant Conductor, and a B.M. with certification in Instrumental Music Education and a Performer's Certificate in Viola from Coe College. She is a member of the League of American Orchestras, International Alliance for Women in Music, and American String Teachers Association, and regularly participates in professional development workshops for conducting, teaching, and music education.

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