

Help Your String Students Master Musicality

Has your mind ever started to wander when you were playing a piece of music at home or during orchestra? Did you start making up a story that goes with the music? If so, your mind might have been trying to help your conscious self unlock your musicality.

By creating a story that accompanies a piece, you allow yourself a deeper connection to the music. This, in turn, allows you to become more expressive—exaggerating dynamics, shaping phrases, and emphasizing bowing articulations—and can help your emotions shine through and transform your playing.

Composers know that music makes the listener feel a certain way because music affects and reflects emotions. Composers sometimes even write specific text instructions in the music score that relate imagery or a setting for the music. These words are meant to help the musician interpret and play the music, and are not meant to be spoken or read aloud during performance. A famous example of this is Antonio Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. In the first movement of the Winter concerto, there is a passage of quiet, repeated notes, and in the corresponding part of the score, Vivaldi wrote: "E pel Soverchio gel batter i denti," which can be loosely translated as, "Our teeth chattering in the extreme cold." Imagine being freezing cold while you play this passage, and it will help make the music come alive!

The ancient Greeks also knew that music is tied to emotions. They even had a system, the doctrine of ethos, for determining which modes relate to certain emotions. And in the Baroque era, there were many treatises written about how certain keys made the listener feel.

You, too, have probably experienced joy, relief, anger, sadness, and other emotions while listening to music. After all, emotions are a natural reaction to music. This same process also works in reverse: you can write or choose particular music to help spur desired emotions. For example, next time you're watching TV or a movie, notice how music is used—it's most often placed during a romantic scene, action scene, or to keep the attention of the audience during a transition. It helps reinforce the emotions and events at key points in the story.

So, if music is connected to the emotions, why not think up a story to help heighten and realize the emotions involved in the piece your students are playing? Imagining a story makes them more interested and willing to explore musical techniques like dynamics, bow control, pacing, and phrasing, so their music becomes more personal, more

musical.

I have often used storytelling with my private and orchestra students as a way to help them play with more passion. With little effort, you can create a story for their music—so, give it a try.

Here's are seven steps you can offer your students:

1. Take a little time to look at a piece of music you're working on.
2. As you look through the music, think about how the music makes you feel—happy, sad, angry?
3. Now make up a story involving a character or a scene that reminds you of what's happening in the music.
4. Don't forget to consider the form of the music and the spacing of the musical phrases when writing your story.
5. Write the story down in your music (along the side or over/under the staff).
6. Play your piece, keeping the story in mind.
7. Listen as you unlock the musicality within!

By Daryl Silberman