
Continuing Education: The Importance Of Reading For The Professional Musician

If you are anything like me, I was thrilled when I graduated from college that I would not have to sit in a classroom again on a regular basis. I imagined my days filled with lots of time to practice and perform. What a wistful dream that was! As I continue on my own professional journey, I am continually reminded of how important it is to continue learning at all cost. Musicians are eternally aware of the necessity of regular practice. We thrive on the opportunity to appear on stage and share our music with an audience.

When we think about it, our education involved so much more than just practice and performance. Why would we think the reading, writing and listening that occurred during those formative years are less important to our continued growth? I love to read fiction. It's my major method of relaxation and escape. I do not find the same enjoyment reading about music. Biographies, articles, and reviews can feel as though they are work and needed to be read with an analytical and intellectual eye. Since I have recognized my feelings toward reading this material, I treat it as part of my work. I schedule time each day to do a little of it and don't read while on vacation or taking a day off. It's impossible to read everything that comes across my desk that I think is valuable. Here's a brief description of the types of reading that I try to include in my weekly reading times.

Books: I am fascinated with composer biographies and spend the majority of my lecture time at the community college devoted to this material. When I read a new biography on a composer, I tend to rework the corresponding lectures. This helps to keep my lectures fresh, but it can also be distracting from other pressing tasks during the school term. When possible, I limit my reading of new biographies to the school breaks. I continue to consult books throughout the year, however. They serve as a first stop whenever I am doing any type of research. What I find is that as I read the passages indicated in the index related to my topic, I get a sense of the author's writing style as well as the depth and breadth of the material. Usually I have a good sense of whether I want to read the entire work or allow it to maintain its status as a research tool. Those books I discover that I do want to read are placed on my active reading list that I consult when choosing my next reading goal.

Blogs: What I miss most about school is the opportunity to share ideas with others in my field and listen to their thoughts. Open dialogue about issues directly related to the field of music is an invaluable tool for personal development. Every morning begins with a reading of the blogs that I follow. Rarely do I comment on the post right away. I enjoy allowing the ideas to simmer in

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my mind throughout the day. This way I find the thoughts of another author sparking new ideas in me; very often these new ideas find their way here to be developed. I include blogs outside of the musical realm in my daily reading as well. I was surprised at how often an article about reading, crafting, cooking, or children have given me inspiration that improves my musicianship. Reading blogs are not the only way the blogosphere has a positive influence on the musician. In the coming days I'll tell you why I find writing a blog so valuable as well. Magazines and Journals: I neglected periodicals for far too long because I always seemed to be interrupted while reading the articles. I also felt that there was simply too much material to read each month to make my subscription worth the cost. Currently I organize journals into three categories:

1. must read entirely;
2. scan and read selections;
3. want to read.

At the moment, there are only two magazines in the first category: Clavier Companion and Worship Leader.

These two works keep me grounded in the major areas of responsibilities that I currently hold as a pianist. When my copy of American Music Teacher arrives, I scan it quickly and identify the articles I want to found itself in this category because many of the blogs I follow are pedagogical in nature and this was one way to allow additional reading in other areas. The list of magazines I would like to read constantly changes. Opera News is currently at the top of the list since I am playing more and more opera scenes and this is a genre about which I have limited knowledge. As I continue to transition to reading on my iPad, I am finding it is easier to read more articles in a shorter amount of time.

Reviews: Musicians often find themselves needing to express intangible musical concepts to non-musicians. Reading reviews are a great way to improve your language for such tasks. Additionally, reviews provide insight into current concert trends while introducing you to unfamiliar music in addition to performers and conductors you might not be familiar with. I also find it fun to read reviews since I enjoy traveling; the articles give me a sense of the musical culture of cities around the world that I have not yet had the opportunity to visit.

Now the obvious question: how much reading do I actually do in a given day? I shoot for an hour of reading throughout the course of the day. If the day is insanely busy and I have very little time to spare (which happens more often than any of us would like), I make sure to get through the day's blogs and try to include a short magazine article.

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