Cultural Exchange, Social Action, and Community Engagement: Forming Your Own Studio Initiatives

MTNA Webinar
Dr. Scott Donald and Alison S. Barr
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Introduction and Incubation

• Growing over time, gradual unfolding;
• Searching for added meaning in our professional life;
• Searching for ways to give back to the community and the world;
• Leaving ourselves open to possibilities;
• Observing that “service” has become a vital part of most High Schools’ expectations;
• Understanding that music is a powerful conduit for social change;
• Thinking beyond the most accessible, such as the Playathon fundraiser or Retirement Home performance model.

Our Ideal Position as Studio Teachers and College Professors

• We are creative;
• We devote our lives to forwarding the culture;
• We love what we do;
• We have empathy;
• We work with children or young adults, many of whom are naturally open to giving back;
• We may already include this in our curriculum on a regular basis;
• We are (somewhat) autonomous, able to formalize curriculum components at will.

Preparation and Inspiration

• Taking “Music and Social Action” course at Coursera online: it’s free, completely online and taught by a Sebastian Ruth, Visiting Lecturer in Community Engagement at Yale
University; Founder and Artistic Director of Community MusicWorks in Providence RI;
• https://www.coursera.org/learn/music-and-social-action
• Asking - What is a musician’s response to the condition of the world? Do musicians have an obligation and an opportunity to serve the needs of the world with their musicianship?
• And what is an educator’s response to all the above?
• As a classical musician and teacher, I am “an important public figure, with a critical role to play in my society.” (from “Music and Social Action, Coursera;)
• What can I do, first, in my own life, and next, within my studio, to give back?
• How can I help my students find fulfillment and meaning through musical expression, beyond standard performance models?

Identify Your Own Dreams
• What do you already contribute?
• What more would you like to do?
• Start by yourself first;
• Encourage your professional organization to become involved;
• Use accessible models: Playathon/Coffeehouse/Retirement Home performances;
• Take on one new project a year;
• Organize your studio curriculum around a theme/cause you support – “Caring for Our Oceans;”
• Let students know what you are doing, especially musically;
• Publish a weekly BLOG, promote on your website and/or Facebook page;
• Plan a Benefit Concert for a cause you believe in;
• Garner larger community to help and support - as in One World, One Music Concert Series at Studio A in Austin, TX.
• Engage your students in the process as you go along.
**Moving Along**

- Formalize what you already have in your studio – name your program and write a statement;
- For example - “Music for Good”

*Music is a powerful force for good. People who hear music, especially those who may not have a lot of opportunity to hear live music, are given a chance to hum along, move a little, think of happy times they may have had, and enjoy being with others who are listening. Also, your music can benefit a good cause, as do our Playathons for Shelters. As a musician, YOU have the power to offer your music to someone who would benefit from it. This year, everyone in the studio will participate in an outside concert – either one I arrange or one you arrange yourself!*

- Follow up with thanks, accountability, and assessment:
  - “Congratulations on having completed this project. You have made a huge difference!”
- Students receive a poster with their photo at the event;
- Questions:
  - How do you think your project helped people?
  - What are the needs of the people being served?
  - Did you feel it was different playing for this project than in a regular recital?
  - Could you imagine doing a different kind of project now that you’ve completed this one? What kind?

**Broadening Our Vision Beyond Our Studio**

- How do we make private piano lessons accessible to students who may not have the means to pay?
- Many of us give scholarships at our own expense - a lovely gesture!
- Many of us give extra time and donate music, etc.
• Massachusetts Music Teachers Association started its own program: “MMTA’s Music Connect;”
• So far, over twenty deserving students have received FREE tuition, and their MMTA member-teachers have received a tuition reimbursement at a professional teaching rate.

The Sky’s the Limit
• Music is about expression, accessing emotions.
• Giving back taps into many of the same areas of our students’ humanity.
• Find concrete ways to help our students grow, expand their expression, and think beyond themselves!
• Brainstorm new ideas that are appropriate and relevant to your own studio – conceive, plan, and implement!

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