



Where Are the Models, Mentors, and Motivators?

Are You Listening to Solo, Chamber, & Orchestral Music?

When I was teaching full-time school orchestra music grades 5-12, the following conversation by students in my program may have been shared at the dinner table. “He wants me to spend time and listen to several outstanding players. I was a little embarrassed when he called on me in class and asked, ‘Who is your favorite violinist?’ and I could not identify a single principal string player or even the current Concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra!”

I was dismayed that as many as 80% of my instrumentalists could not respond with the name of a famous classical musician who is currently playing their instrument! This brings the issue to the forefront my greatest concern: DOES ANYONE LISTEN TO GOOD MUSIC ANYMORE?

Obviously, most people learning how to play golf, tennis, ballet, ice skating, gymnastics or any of the contact sports, could instantly name their “hero” and leading examples in their field. Can you imagine not watching a professional athlete model his/her technique? For example, if you wanted to learn how to be a high-diver or competitive swimmer, would you simply read a book on the subject, study the moves, take a few lessons, practice in the pool, and not once attend a local swim meet or watch the Olympic event when it appeared on TV?

Pittsburgh has a strong cultural base, providing a home for the world-class Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Pops, the Pittsburgh Ballet and Pittsburgh Opera companies, and the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera productions, to name a few venues. We are also most fortunate that many amateur or semi-professional groups such as the Pittsburgh Civic Orchestra, Washington Symphony, and River City Brass Band are local (some concerts presented conveniently next door in the Upper St. Clair HS Theatre). Professional soloists and chamber groups visit our city nearly every month, and opportunities to enjoy free concerts are limitless on cable/FIOS television and WQED.



This revelation motivated me to bring my laptop computer to every music lesson and ensemble rehearsal to share musical examples. With truly “basic” technology, there is really no excuse for not exploring a sea of masterpieces, watching a virtuoso performing his craft up-close – thanks especially to online resources such as www.youtube.com. Here’ are just a few “totally free” audio examples:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5K8UZrMG2Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgpJV13tDbY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zr2Ky9YFPN0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJwecS3kNCM>

Here is the *musicianship prescription* – tips on providing meaningful motivation, momentum, and exposure to GREAT works of art in order to become more **culturally connected** and **musically literate**:

- Families: Take the *music break* and listen to Classical (all styles/eras), folk, pop/jazz music at least once a week.
- Encourage your musician to regularly use his/her computer/tablet to watch performances on the web.
- Choose several favorite soloists playing the same instrument you are studying, and follow them.
- Buy CDs of music or download movements of concertos, sonatas, or symphonies from iTunes, etc.
- Go to a live professional concert at least once a year – more often in the summer, if possible.

See Mrs. Fox’s listening enrichment @ <http://www.shjo.org/foxs-fireside/www.shjo.org/>



Paul K. Fox, Director, South Hills Junior Orchestra

www.shjo.org