

Last year, I attended the 2011 Mark Wood Rock Orchestra Camp with the goal of not only discovering new “tricks” to use with my students, but to gain insight as to what it is students are looking for in their orchestral experience. Prior to the camp, I saw that students wanted to be part of a group, to be involved in something that was not only fun but meaningful. But during MWROC I witnessed people of all ages reveling in the opportunity to find their voice. Whether it was jam sessions, combo groups, or improvisation classes, everybody was there to not only be a part of something, but to connect with something within them. I have since come to the conclusion that although large-group orchestral experiences are still a vital part of student learning, they are no longer sufficient in and of themselves.

I would love to learn how to orchestrate a combo concert similar to the one we participated in at camp. I especially was impressed with Matt Vanacoro’s approach of giving a leading sheet and guiding the performers through creating backgrounds and improvisations. Participants gained such an immense foundation of theory within a short amount of time, with immediate application and without the use of expansive lectures and chord charts. It would be a delight to learn how to do that for my students, from the selection of literature to the assembly and performance.

My students have lately been asking me to compose and arrange for them. I know how to take something off a piano lead and rewrite it for a string quartet of equally experienced performers who don’t all have the need to be spotlighted. But to take a contemporary song and transcribe it for students of various levels in a way that spotlights everybody without sounding sterile.....well, that’s a different matter altogether. I would like to learn more about how to overcome this obstacle, maybe even discover that the mountain is merely a molehill.

I will be honest; I do not attend MWROC just for my students. Last year’s experience benefited me on a personal level as well. During my years as a music student, I compartmentalized my musical life into mandatory and personal categories. I did not allow the classical violinist to interact with the inner rock chick, for I was convinced that the two would only fight for supremacy. Plus I found it safer to remain unnoticed in the background, so my voice remained silent. During MWROC, I was forced to confront and push through these personal barriers. The two sides of my musical personality are now in the process of getting to know each other. I take more risks than I used to, not only as a musician, but as a teacher and a human being. I am seeking out more performance and teaching opportunities, not because it’s what I’m supposed to do but because it’s what I crave. Something dormant was awakened during last year’s MWROC and it yearns to come out of its cave.

In the process of battling these anxieties and barriers, I developed a new empathy for my students. My first improvisation experience at camp, in front of Mark Wood himself, was petrifying. Intellectually I knew that I wouldn’t be condemned but supported and that my efforts would be applauded regardless of the outcome. But I still had to deal with the fear of the unknown and perform regardless of all the “What if...?” scenarios that tried to paralyze me in that moment. It gave me a new

appreciation for my students during moments such as their first-ever playing test. Now that I have walked in their shoes, I can better serve them and help them shine.

In short, I am returning to MWROC for my both students and myself. The skills fostered there are going to be vital to the students not only as musicians, but as human beings and America's future leaders. My students need a voice, and it is my responsibility to give them the platform on which to be heard.

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