

(from Carroll McLaughlin's seminar at AHS Conference)

## HOW TO LEARN FASTER AND PERFORM WITHOUT STRESS

People tend to learn in three basically different ways:

1. Visually - how we see the notes and the strings
2. Aurally - how we hear the music
3. Kinesthetically - how it feels

When we practice, we have to "triple-channel" everything we learn, so that (to use an airplane analogy) if one engine bursts into flames, we can still land the plane with two. Everyone has a dominant system that they favour over the others. If you discover what yours is, it will help you develop new learning strategies in the other systems.

(Determine what your dominant type of learning style is and tell me at the next lesson. If you would prefer me to teach more in that style, we can try that.)

When someone asks us where we left our keys, we look up and to the left. When we are dreaming about the future, we look up and to the right. When you try to imagine a feeling, you look down. The direction of our eyes is actually a clue to how we are processing information.

To implant a strong VISUAL memory:

Start with a photocopied piece of music that you can colour on.

\*Hold your music up and to the left and study it. Look carefully at everything: dynamics, fingerings, pedal changes or lever flips, etc.

\*Highlight in a bright colour the Repair Points (pedal diagrams or lever charts at the start of each phrase, where you can start from memory). Also highlight dynamics and other pedal markings or lever charts.

\*Highlight important sections and concepts in different colours. Coordinate similar colours to integrate ideas.

\*Visualize yourself performing beautifully and calmly.

\*Try writing out the music from memory, especially difficult sections. Do this before going to bed.

AURAL:

\*Say the names of the notes out loud as you play them. You can use solfège if you know it.

\*Say the pedals out loud as you practice tricky parts.

\*Count the rhythm out loud.

\*At a quiet moment, present your whole concert in your mind, perhaps looking to your right at ear level (aural construct). Hear the beauty of your music and be impressed at how confident you sounded. If there is one area that feels uncomfortable, review that first at the next practice session.

\*Daily repetition is imperative. In order for information to pass from short-term memory to long-term, we must have many repetitions of the same material. It is far better to work short amounts every day for a week or a month than to try to

cram for hours right before a concert.

\*Learn in SMALL amounts. Less is better, with at least ten repetitions of each idea, in all three learning modes. Triple-channel it!

#### KINESTHETIC:

\*For every phrase and piece, think about what mood or feeling you want to communicate. Happy? Irreverent? Anxious? Elegant?

\*Feel how you will be in front of your audience. Imagine the floor under your feet, the lights, the size of the room, etc.

\*Be aware of your posture. Raise your chin, straighten the backbone and push back the shoulders. This puts you into visual mode, which is the safest for a flawless concert.

\*To feel the rhythm, practice your music in your head as you are walking along.

\*Press your fingers into the strings and "press out" the tone. Be aware of the distance between each finger.

#### IN PERFORMANCE:

\*Backstage, look up! Stage fright is a feeling, therefore it is stored in kinesthetic, accessed by looking down.

\*INTERNAL DIALOGUE is helpful in practice but not in performance. Here are suggestions for "conquering" those pesky voices:

1. Make a deal. In performance you will put the suggestions for improvement into an imaginary box in your head. After each performance, you promise to "open the box" and learn from the suggestions. Warning: do not break your part of the bargain. The voices will only get louder next time.

2. Do not engage in conversation with yourself while performing! If left alone, extraneous thoughts will pass..like a cloud in the sky. If you engage it, you have a thunderstorm.

3. Practice giving "pre-performances". An ideal number is 10 of these before the real thing.

4. In practice, if you make a mistake, play through it! Don't stop! Then you can go back and repair it after you have found strategies for getting through it. Make a list or put check-marks on them, and work them separately after finishing the piece or the section.

\*Practice in the clothes you will be wearing, especially the shoes. If you are not comfortable, it will force you into kinesthetic mode whether you like it or not.

\*Do not try to mind-read the audience.

\*Focus as much as possible. Keep your eye on the ball.

\*NEXT or DELETE. If you have made an error, FORGET IT! Put your attention to what is coming up, not what has already happened.

Remember, we are COMMUNICATORS on stage. Communicate happiness and enthusiasm when you play, and nobody will care whether you missed a note.