



YAMAHA

Articles for Music Educators



What has Tiger Woods got to do with it?

By Joan Watson

Watching golf on TV is close to watching paint dry for me, but one day when Scott had the Master's Tournament on, something caught my eye. It was the focus that Tiger Woods brings to his game. An announcer said "you know, Tiger has no short term memory when he is playing".

Now, the reason I don't golf is because I have tried. I even have a trophy for the longest drive in a tournament - a fluke actually. But I don't golf because it is the same to me as playing horn professionally. I found myself out for a nice afternoon to relax on the course with friends and ended up having to focus intently, muster up Buddhist like concentration, to hit a tiny ball into a tiny hole - seemed just like playing the horn to me - staying focused to hit a very small harmonic exactly the way I wanted it under pressure. No thanks! I want to relax when I'm relaxing. This is performing - being able to do what you want to do with consistency under pressure.

How does one learn this and is it important at whatever level you are in your musical development? Well, I would argue that satisfaction in golf and in music making comes from knowing your abilities well enough to be consistent and to be able to let go and have fun without losing quality. I believe this comes from practicing performing. There is an old saying "amateurs practice until they get it right, professionals practice until they can't get it wrong.". There comes a point in music making when you have to practice performing and stop practicing practicing. Which is why I believe entering young music students in festivals, competitions, opportunities to perform is vitally important to their growth and ability to know themselves and their consistency level so they can improve quickly.

At the Kiwanis Festival in Toronto last February, I was surprised to see how few young brass players were entered. There were only about three private teachers represented. I was surprised because I entered the Kiwanis Festival from the time I started horn in grade five until I finished university. At the higher levels there was the motivation of getting into the Provincials and Nationals and even winning some money. Where are all the entrants? Why are the Kiwanis and Canadian Music Competition bereft of wind and brass players? There seems to be encouragement for voice, piano and strings but not winds. Is it because of "competition" being considered a bad thing? When I started playing, festivals were just another chance to play, learn new repertoire, get some feedback from someone other than your teacher, and get out of school for the afternoon - lots of great reasons to enter. Each year's festival experience was a landmark of progress in the mark I got or in the adjudication. One adjudicator actually wrote that I should consider a career in music and I took that so to heart that I still remember that endorsement an entire career later.

I think the performing experience gives one a tremendous learning opportunity on so many levels:

- learning music for just your instrument and piano or a duet with a friend, etc.,
- playing with a pianist - having to rehearse and talk about chamber music give and take without a conductor telling you how to play,
- having to focus when you need it like Tiger Woods does when performing,
- learning how to behave on a stage giving new understanding when attending a performance as an audience member,
- getting a written adjudication to take home and really think about the observations of someone you don't know and how accurate that is for you,.

All in all a great deal for the money invested.

As someone who loves teaching and loves music making, I truly encourage all music teachers in schools and privately to enter your students in any festivals in your area. Get them playing solo or duet or trios or quintets. Get them an experience that will bring so much to your band program in terms of their learning curve accelerating. Get them an experience that will motivate them to practice and ask questions and have fun.

Talk about instant gratification - that moment of focus , that "ball gliding into the 18th hole", even a few notes of excellence and then the applause of the audience. Just like golf tournaments, music festivals are an opportunity to share your music and compete with yourself to improve. Adults and kids alike can get out there and hit a great game or at least a better game than last time. It is wonderful that so many bands enter MusicFest and other festivals, but getting students out individually or in a chamber group will go a long way to improving every band. So, as an occasional adjudicator and as a professional musician I challenge everyone teaching music and anyone learning an instrument to get those wind and brass players into the festivals across this country. It is substantially more fun than watching golf on TV.



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