

Rick's Place
Notes, Thoughts, and Random Musings on the Online Experience
by Rick Hein, AMIS web master

We are born with access to the essence of all music, and we spend the rest of our lives searching for inner harmony while we sort through the external noises.

from *The Tao of Music: Using Music To Change Your Life*
John M. Ortiz

By now, some sanity should be appearing again in your life and the life of your school. The various celebrations of the winter season should be just concluding. You have concertised, carolled, welcomed in the boar's head, sung wassail, serenaded and rapped your way through a set of traditional celebrations and holidays that you, your community and your predecessors have developed. Perhaps you have founded a new tradition, perhaps you have participated in a centuries old tradition. In both cases, you have forged a link to a tradition greater than yourself and introduced your students to one of the roles musicians play in maintaining and inventing culture.

I had the good fortune this year to play in a thirty piece orchestra helping a restaurant group celebrate Christmas. It is a family run, Italian business with branches up and down the British isles, and a few hundred people were invited to the lighting of the Christmas tree in the flagship branch in Covent Garden and then to a sumptuous dinner and entertainment at St. Lukes, the home of the London Symphony Orchestra in north London.

What a noisy day it was - the two and a half hour drive from my home in furthest south suburban London through the heart of London, crossing London Bridge, then through the City of London to the tranquility of the St. Luke centre. Well, it should have been tranquil.

When I arrived at 10:00 for the 11:00 rehearsal, the converted church was filled with catering staff setting up tables, the sound men rigging the stage and the crew setting up chairs and stands. I unpacked the keyboard in my assigned place and spoke to the sound man about the pa connections. I arrived with the arranger - the pieces were set out - Bolero, *Oh mio babbino caro*, *Canto della Terra*, The Prayer, *Habñera* and as a finale The Anvil Chorus. Encore 1 was *Nessun dorma* and encore two (a sing-a-long) *Volaré*. It was an Italian celebration...

The rest of the players arrived - we tuned, and set off on our journey of musical discovery. The conductor took time to rehearse where he could, and reminded us to listen, watch and most of all tune. Quick runs through the pieces proved that the arrangements and the conductor's score didn't always match - we had no bar numbers or letters. Many DS and Coda and repeats were included, all different for the various parts. Hand-written parts produced these noises in the rehearsal. I made it my personal goal is to help the arranger make the transition to computer notated music. Three hours later, it was lunch, In the afternoon the adult singers joined us, then a children's choir from a local primary school. All went well with the adults, but a problem arose.

The decision was made to pre-record the choir in the anvil chorus as they were entering la-laing the big tune, carrying candles and weaving through the tables on their way to the stage. One bass player and I stayed to provide the accompaniment for their singing, and eventually the recording was finished. It was difficult to maintain my role as keyboard player while the producer, conductor, and teacher worked with the choir trying to get them to 'pitch up' to the requirements. What anyone one of us could have done with them in that ten minutes.

The noises around them were clamorous; three adults, each offering conflicting advice on how to achieve the musical goal; the strange surroundings, the journey from school, the best pressed school clothes and choir sweatshirt. They were closer by the end, but the external noises had almost overcome them. In the run through of the performance order, the tape cues were agreed and we played along with the tape so it could be faded as the children reached the microphones.

In the evening, all went as planned - orchestra and chorus in white tie and tails; children scrubbed up and glowing; the tenor suitably suave and the soprano radiating beauty. The children sang better than in the afternoon because the entire choir was there, not just the ten chosen singers to record.

The day was a reminder to me that in the seasonal or festival heat of performance, the noise is minimised by proper preparation prior to the performance, security in the basics of the instrument, thorough rehearsal, awareness of the performance venue, practice in the performance venue, the power of a whole group to create a performance and good psychology in uniting the group and focussing them on their best performance. These external preparations assisted us in realising the co-operative inner harmony of a performance that entertained the audience, raised their festive celebrations and even kindled the festive spirit in at least this performer.

Gladdest tidings of the season and all the best in the New Year!

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