

## **CMPLY Refreshing**

**Cornelia Watkins, CMP Committee member**

You know the excitement you feel when learn something really interesting?—that spark inside when you make a special discovery, or read an amazing article, or hear a profoundly moving story on the news. It lifts you out of the mundane and quickens your mind. What usually follows is an irrepressible urge to share it—you can't really keep it to yourself, can you? You'll find someone— your spouse, your friend, your kid, just about anyone who will listen—"I've got to tell you, I learned the coolest thing today..."

Wouldn't it be great to have your rehearsals and lessons sparked by this same kind of urge to share something extraordinary? It's all right there in front of us. Music stimulates nearly every facet of our being: mind, body, and spirit; it responds to and reflects back our feelings and moods, our environment, even our society. Performing simultaneously requires both strong independence and flexible collaboration, and juxtaposes the best-laid plans with the calling for creative spontaneity. And if all this wasn't thrilling enough, the study of great music offers a glimpse into the minds and souls of some of the most brilliant people who ever walked the planet. How extraordinary that sharing this exciting experience is what we are paid to do!

When we find ourselves in the doldrums from time to time, it's probably because we've lost sight of this extraordinary opportunity. Caught up with the day to day must-do's—fix this rhythm, get that in tune, make sure ticket money is turned in—we can go for days not sharing, and perhaps not even remembering, what's most significant about the experience of music.

### **TWINKLE REVISITED**

Sometimes the problem is just us— having done this for years, we mistakenly assume we know everything we need to know about a piece and how to teach it. But when we're willing to dig deeper, good music always has more to offer, revealing a wealth of teaching ideas that can keep our excitement alive and that desire to share immediate.

Let's consider "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," a classic nursery song often used to teach young instrumentalists all-important foundational techniques. A well-honed approach to skills is a great start, but we've only just begun to fathom the possibilities. For instance, students should know that the first and third lines are the same, the second is different—helpful information for practicing and performing. But we can teach ternary form using many rich strategies. Here are some ideas:

- ABA is everywhere in a child's world including peanut butter sandwiches and Oreo cookies. Students can find their own examples at home, draw pictures or use gestures and dance to demonstrate. Explore the similarities and differences between the A and B sections, and how they work to both unify and create contrast. Help them compose a short piece in ABA and perform it, utilizing contrasting ideas as simple as open strings or different dynamics. Students can listen to and identify other songs in ternary form.

Let's dig deeper still. An analysis of this French folk tune reveals a remarkable balance and simplicity in its melody and rhythm. Mozart chose it as the theme for a beautiful set of variations for piano, and

the classic structure has attracted other composers such as Saint-Saens, Liszt and Dohnányi, among others. Based on this concept:

- **Beginners** can create their own variation using rhythm, dynamics, or tone quality changes. With some guidance, more advanced students reviewing the tune can vary notes as well as rhythm, dynamics and style. These can be improvised, or written to teach notation.

Research also shows that over centuries dating back to 1761, a wide variety of words and couplet poems have been set to this music—Christmas carols, lullabies, teaching songs, silly songs. With this in mind:

- **Students** can write their own words to the music. Have them explore dynamics, tone and articulations to suit the mood of their composition. At the performance, the students' lyrics can be recited or included in the program notes for all to enjoy.

Now we have a plan full of information and creativity, drawn directly from the music and its history, utilizing a variety of learning styles and student-centered approaches while providing ways to know students really learned. A plan like this can help keep things fresh and interesting during the weeks (and sometimes months) students work on this piece. When will the next beginner walk through the door? This is going to be fun!

## MAKING TIME TO PLAN AND RECHARGE

Unpacking a piece of music to reveal its treasures is at the core of the CMP planning process. From those riches, teachers decide for themselves what is most significant for their students to learn and experience, and use the model to craft meaningful strategies and assessments that ensure their teaching objectives are achieved. The planning process accommodates a wide range of music choices from the simplest to the most complex, and teachers and students in all situations—band, choir, orchestra, studio, and general music, from grade school to college—have reaped the benefits.

Of course, creating a great lesson plan takes time and energy to evolve, which is why CMP offers its summer workshop: five days away from the routine to focus on a new plan and refresh our enthusiasm. Like a greenhouse, a CMP workshop is the perfect setting for growth and the cross-pollination of ideas. And it's not just the participants who benefit from the fertile environment: there's not a CMP committee member who doesn't feel expanded and renewed each summer, working alongside other dedicated teachers, exploring new possibilities and exchanging wonderful ideas.

## AND SPEAKING OF REFRESHING PROGRAMS...

The 2009 CMP workshop at UW Stevens Point will offer some new features:

- **A One-day Studio Teacher Intensive** for those who can't take five days off, but want to know more about using the CMP approach in the private lesson setting
- **A Jazz Band demo rehearsal** to show how CMP works in an alternative style setting
- College credit available through **Viterbo University**

Please check the CMP website ([www.wmea.com/cmp](http://www.wmea.com/cmp)) for registration information, and join us for the workshop in June—we can't wait to share CMP with you!

**Cornelia Watkins** lives in Houston, Texas and has been a member of the CMP committee since 2004. She is a Lecturer in Music at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music and teaches cello in its Preparatory Program. Corky is also the author of *Rosindust: Teaching, Learning and Life from a Cellist's Perspective*. Email: [rosindust@earthlink.net](mailto:rosindust@earthlink.net)