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In the moment...

by Sandra Brown Williams, OR-ACDA President



It had been awhile since I had seen my friend. Even though I had been forewarned, it was still a surprise that he did not recognize me and had absolutely no sense of what had been or what will be.

One truly understands “in the moment” when confronting a victim of Alzheimer’s. The smile was still there. After failing attempts to share in some way, I spotted the guitar case. He watched as I carefully took out the guitar. The guitar was placed in his hands. Somehow his hands found the familiar hold. He asked, “What do I do?” I began to sing the three notes of introduction . . . sustaining the third note while his hands searched the frets for the matching chord. He found it and we smiled with anticipation. My anticipation because I knew what was going to happen, his anticipation because he did not know. I slowly began to sing, “I . . .can’t. . .give. . .you anything but love, baby.”

We sang for forty minutes. His wife would feed me the words, because I could not remember them all. They had been his songs. The first songs he had learned early in his life. The songs he sang with his brothers. He could not remember the songs he had written, but he remembered the first songs he learned. He did not remember we had sung the songs, but when I left, he lingered on the porch and smiled as I threw kisses from the car.

Two weeks later I taught at the Suzuki Institute in Eugene. When I looked into the eyes of the four to six-year-old children and saw their anticipation, I thought of my eighty-two-year-old friend. I had renewed interest in the importance of teaching these young children. I’ve since heard that the first music learned is sometimes the last to be forgotten. Those children were “in the moment.” I’m sure that is why the first class session ended in such pandemonium. The scarf activity had gone so well. In a floating tone with an artistic lilt, I said, “Drop the beautifully colored scarves in a puddle of color at my feet.” Then they proceeded to dive into the puddle, slide on the scarves,

crash into one another, and laugh or cry depending on where and how they landed. Yes, all of the Suzuki parents were watching. It had been awhile since I had taught preschoolers. The next day I, too, was “in the moment.” And I was good.

Upon reflection, I was intrigued with my eighty-two-year-old friend’s sensitivity to pitch. He grimaced with distaste when we were out of tune with one another. We were, of course, singing harmony. When a chord was particularly beautiful or interesting to him, he would smile and say, “Oh, yeah.” When the young children in the Suzuki Institute began to sing more in tune, the room was peaceful.

A four-year-old sat in my lap at a concert. As he listened to the more experienced students play so wonderfully, he did not move. He was “in the moment.”

Children recognize beauty. They also recognize the absence of it. The small Texas town of 200 in which I was raised did not have a fine choir. In fact, my brothers and sister and I were often sent out of church for responding so dramatically to the singing. Our rubber faces would slowly and graphically move as the pitch glided to its final resting place. If it did not land near the mark, we would collapse on a pew like abandoned puppets. Promising never to do it again, we anxiously awaited the next solo.

I encourage all of us to take advantage of opportunities to step outside of our familiar routines in order to enliven our teaching and rediscover the fruits of being “in the moment.” I suggest the following:

- Have your students watch someone who is intently involved in making beautiful music.
- Remember to have your students sing phrases mentally and practice their intent. Be sure they are smiling, thinking musically, and breathing correctly during this practice.
- Play a recording of some music for your students that literally takes your breath away.

- Teach a song to someone who is not the age of your regular students.
- Break the rehearsal routine by doing something very different. Or. break the chaos with a definite routine.
- Invite a guest to your class who has a story to tell about the power of music.

In other Oregon ACDA news

Congratulations to all of the Oregon choirs that will be performing at NWACDA. They are **Linn-Benton Community College** (Hal Eastburn), **Portland Symphonic Girlchoir** (Roberta Jackson), **Willamette University Male Ensemble** (Paul Klemme), **Southern Oregon Repertory Singers** (Paul French), **Portland State University Chamber Choir** (Bruce Browne), **David York Ensemble** (David York), **Leslie Middle School Jazz Choir** (Carol Stenson), **South Salem High School** (Loren Wenz), **Mt. Hood Community College** (Dave Barduhn), and **Willamette University Vocal Jazz Ensemble** (Wallace Long).

In addition, Wallace Long of Willamette University is presenting an interest session on "The Jazz Sound," and Solveig Holmquist will present "Reaching Community Chorus Singers." Oregon Round Tables will include Jon Baker, Solveig Holmquist, Matt Strauser, Roberta Jackson, and Darrell James.

Oregon ACDA and Sheet Music Service (Michael Sagun) was pleased to have Jing Ling Tam at the 2001 Summer Workshop. Hosted by the University of Portland, the workshop included a full day of choral reading sessions for all age levels.

The August 8-10, 2002, workshop will present Don Brinegar of Los Angeles. The Donald Brinegar Singers performed at national ACDA in San Antonio. The August workshop will also include interest sessions for young, middle level, high school, and mature voices. Don Brinegar will be at the Thursday evening, August 8 session specific for Music and Worship (R&S Chair, Tom Miller).

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