

Why I Teach Music

by William Majors

There are few things in life that describe the “musical moment.” If you’ve ever listened to the music of great composers like Beethoven, Mozart and Shostakovich or to great jazz performers like Louie Armstrong, Miles Davis, or John Coltrane, there lies in all great music what I call the “musical moment.” In professional recordings, you might hear a “musical moment” several times. In fact, I would consider some great performances as one big musical moment. If you have ever listened to Beethoven: Symphonies No.5 and No.7 by Kleiber’s Vienna Philharmonic or Sonata Pathetique performed by Wilhelm Kempff, then you have been immersed in the “musical moment.” If you have ever listened to Adagio for Strings by Samuel Barber performed by the London Philharmonic then you can identify the moment in time when we touch the face of God.

As a band director, my passion is to lead my students into the creation of their own musical moment. Those moments may occur while performing a solo or as part of a concert band or smaller ensemble.

At the middle school level, these “musical moments” can be few and far between. I am talking about that moment in time during a musical phrase where, sure, all the technical stuff lines up, but then, the experience moves to a higher plane. In the middle of a band rehearsal or concert, little Johnny looks across the stage at little Suzie as something has just happened that words cannot explain. A smile or even a tear appears on their face because they have experienced a “musical moment.” Not just any moment, but one they have produced together as a team!

Getting to this one small moment in time has taken days, weeks, months and even years of steady practice. Mundane drills of scales, arpeggios, tone studies, rhythm exercises, intonation tendencies, harmonic alignment and melodic phrasing studies have finally produced this one special moment. And that experience is something no one can ever take from them. It usually becomes a memory that lasts a lifetime.

This is why I teach music. This is why I feverishly expect excellence each and every day! Watching and waiting for those kids to experience the “musical moment” is why I do some of the crazy things I do. Encouraging the kid who I know has potential, to stick it out just a little longer because I know this amazing experience is just around the corner. I envision those days where the “musical moment” becomes the entire performance of a work. The “musical moment” becomes a way of life. This is why I teach music!