

Zen and the Art of Concert Prep

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What Constitutes Art?

Can piano technology ever aspire to be art?

What separates art from craft?

Creative vs interpretive art

What is Zen in Art?

Suzuki (1957:30) suggests that Oriental art depicts spirit, while Western art depicts form.

Watts (1957:174) holds that the West sees and depicts nature in terms of man - made symmetries and superimposed forms, squeezing nature to fit his own ideas, while the East accepts the object as is, and presents it for what it is, not what the artist thinks it means.

Western Art

Art in the West has developed a complex linguistic symbolism through which the artist manipulates his material to communicate something to his audience. Art as communication is basic to Western aesthetics, as is the corollary interrelationship of form and content. Music is considered a language of feeling (Hanslick 1957) and consists of "sonorous moving forms." A landscape painting in the Western tradition is not merely an aesthetically pleasing reproduction; the artist uses his techniques of balance, perspective, and color, to express a personal reaction to the landscape -- his painting is a frozen human mood. The aesthetic object is used as a link between the audience and the artist's feelings. And the artist's technique is used to create an illusion of the forms of reality.

Zen Art

The Zen artist, on the other hand, tries to suggest by the simplest possible means the inherent nature of the aesthetic object. Anything may be painted, or expressed in poetry, and any sounds may become music. The job of the artist is to suggest the essence, the eternal qualities of the object, which is in itself a work of natural art before the artist arrives on the scene. In order to achieve this, the artist must fully understand the inner nature of the aesthetic object, its Buddha nature. This is the hard part. Technique, though important, is useless without it; and the actual execution of the art work may be startlingly spontaneous, once the artist has comprehended the essence of his subject.

Spiritual Mastery vs

Technical Mastery in Zen

Belief in the superiority of spiritual mastery over technical mastery is evidenced by numerous stories of bushido matches (Japanese sword fighting) in which untrained monks defeated trained samurai because they naturally comprehended the basic nature of the bushido contest, and had no fear of death whatsoever.

Technique in Concert Piano Preparation

Tuning Technique
Regulating Technique
Voicing Technique

Understanding Your Subject

A Chinese painter was once commissioned to paint the Emperor's favorite goat. The artist asked for the goat, that he might study it. After two years the Emperor, growing impatient, asked for the return of the goat; the artist obliged. Then the Emperor asked about the painting. The artist confessed that he had not yet made one, and taking an ink brush he drew eight nonchalant strokes, creating the most perfect goat in the annals of Chinese painting.

Technique vs Understanding

“The actual techniques of voicing are relatively simple. It is gaining the judgment of when, how, and how much to apply them that is difficult. ”

“An experienced, savvy concert technician can accomplish more in a few minutes than a neophyte technician can accomplish in several hours.”

“Beauty cannot be measured; it must be perceived.”

Technique in Art

“My feeling about technique in art is that it has about the same value as technique in lovemaking. That is to say on the one hand, heartfelt ineptitude has its appeal, and, on the other hand, so does heartless skill. But what you want is passionate virtuosity. ”

--John Barth

The Psyche of the Piano Technician

Focused on the Perfect Tuning
Focused on technical details
Convinced that the piano sounds good “because of me.”

The Psyche of the Pianist Before a Concert

Nerves
Self- doubt
Obsession with the piano

Think of the child within the artist

What is Our Role?

“...I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord , one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,

Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous... ”
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous,
Almost, at times, the fool... ”
--T.S. Eliot

Role Playing

Concert Pianist & Piano Technician

Case Histories

Katherine

Ann

Craig

The Piano With Multiple Personality Disorder

Life in the Zone

Accessing the Zone

Use With Caution

The Dedicated Piano

Technician

Servant to music

Servant to the pianist

You are modular

Purity of purpose

What We Work For

In my craft or sullen art

Exercised in the still night

When only the moon rages

And the lovers lie abed

With all their griefs in their arms,

I labor by singing light

Not for ambition or bread

Or the strut and trade of charms

On the ivory stages

But for the common wages

Of their most secret heart.

-- Dylan Thomas

Into the Sunset...