By Courtney Crappell, NCTM, with Brendan Jacklin and Clinton Pratt, NCTM

The ABCs of Gen X, Y(P), Z

A Column for Young Professionals

Using Multimedia To Enhance Lessons And Recitals

Part II

In Part I of this series, we explored the possibility of using multimedia music[1] in both the teaching studio and public performances. With the aid of YouTube, visualizers and MIDI keyboard animation programs, we introduced ways to foster student creativity and increase motivation while enhancing musical and artistic understanding.[2] In Part II, we discuss more possibilities of adding visual components and ways to include extra-audio and non-technological media. As in the previous issue, we refer to various YouTube videos that demonstrate these performances in action. A playlist of these videos can be located on the Bonus Bytes page at www.mtna.org.

While the moving images of video and animation offer an infinite variety of ways to enhance musical performances, the power of the simpler still photograph remains significant to audiences. Simply displaying a series of images, in other words, a slideshow, changes listening experiences dramatically. To begin a project such as this, the student and teacher should take new photographs, choose images from their personal library or find them online and in magazines, to fit the character, mood or story of the piece to be performed. Alternatively, the teacher could pre-select photographs and have students imagine and improvise music that complements the image. This exploratory activity fits the format of group lessons quite well by facilitating communication and creativity among groups of students. Whether preparing for a public performance or only furthering lesson experiences, using images in this way will begin to stimulate the student's imagination.

To find images online, Google offers the possibility to search any term and see related images. Often, photographers own these images, and they might require you to pay a fee for public display. Alternatively, the site www.compfight.com searches the photo-sharing website www.flickr.com. It offers the possibility to filter results by "creative commons." Under this label, content may be shared and used in more flexible ways than those under stricter copyright law.

Once the images are selected, the duration of the performance should be matched to the length of the slideshow. The student can decide to display each image for a determined length of time or to customize the durations to coincide with the mood of the music. Presentation software, such as Microsoft's *PowerPoint*, Apple's *Keynote* or the online application, *Prezi,* allows users to set the duration of images during the slideshow.[3] Alternatively, an assistant can manually advance slides during the performance at predetermined intervals or moments. Using an AirTurn Bluetooth connected foot pedal, the performer himself could also choose to do this while playing on stage. The performer would need to tap the pedal to advance the slideshow to the next slide.[4] Advancing slides manually during performance helps keep the timing accurate in case of improvised moments, unexpected tempo changes or memory errors.

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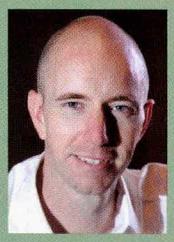

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Slideshows within the context of classical performance have grown in popularity as the necessary technology has become affordable and more commonly available.[5] For orchestra, Holst's *The Planets* is often set to images, and pianists sometimes feature Schumann's *Carnival* and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* set to slideshows that capture the spirit of each movement. The programs or ideas of works like these readily adapt to slideshows, but the mood and character of absolute music can also be enhanced with images. At a multimedia music concert titled MusicAlive!, one student performer presented a slideshow in a performance of J.S. Bach's *Gigue from the Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major, BWV 825*.[6] To synchronize each image with the music, the student pre-recorded the piece for performance. This required him to carefully consider the import and character of every single note and resulted in an effective and sophisticated interpretation of the dance (see Video 1).

Thus far, we have examined technological aids in creating multimedia music. Another option involves adding movement through live action accompaniment. Matching well with the philosophy of Dalcroze's Eurhythmics, students can be free to move around, embodying the music through movement while the teacher plays their piece. Then students can come up with a more specific story involving different characters, perhaps creating a more elaborate choreography or dramatization. Exploring these ideas helps students gain a deeper understanding of music, and in turn, contributes to more effective execution when they play the piece themselves. In the MusicAlive! concert mentioned previously, one student played *The Flight of the Fly*, by Carolyn Miller, while two other students acted out a story that fit the music. One pretended to be the fly while the other student chased her with a giant fly swatter! In another performance, a student choreographed a ball-bouncing routine that four other students did on stage while the musician played the *The Dizzy Dazzling Juggling Act*, by Catherine Rollin (see Video 2).

Students also enjoy the opportunity to dress up for performances. For one of the author's summer camp performances, a group of students performed on stage in costumes that matched the concept of the music. The students created forest animal masks that would match the sounds that each would improvise at the piano. For example, one student wore an elephant mask and made low and loud sounds during his turn at the instrument. To fill out the texture, the teacher improvised accompaniment based on an African Pygmy song that matched the "animals of the forest" theme. The student "animals" roamed the stage freely while individuals approached the piano for a turn to improvise.

Poetry can also easily be added to a musical performance. Many classical pieces inspired by famous poems can be timed to include a reading of the actual poems on stage—either during or before the performance. Ideally, the performers should carefully plan the best pacing or placement of the spoken word for the most aesthetically pleasing result. Students looking for inspiration could explore standard repertoire that obviously relates to poems. For example, Debussy's *Claire de Lune*, based on a poem by Verlaine, or Brahms's *Ballade, Op. 10, No. 1*, based on the ballad/poem, "Edward, Edward." Brendan Jacklin, one of this article's authors, performed Philip Glass's *Wichita Vortex Sutra* while a studio-mate read Allen Ginsberg's poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra." Glass wrote this musical work in response to the written poem.

Incorporating live action, dance or poetry requires relatively little, if any, extra hardware. Actors and dancers should be illuminated clearly. Notably, this could require a change from the standard concert lighting for solo instruments in certain venues. If adequate lighting is unavailable, your students can creatively solve lighting problems by having the non-performing studio peers manually illuminate the "scene" with handheld flashlights. For the spoken portion, adequate amplification through a microphone and speaker will produce the most desirable results.

The possibility of incorporating non-musical elements can both inspire and motivate student creativity through composition. Another student performer in the MusicAlive! concert mentioned previously created his own work for multimedia performance. He used both video and an original composition to showcase a special talent: solving a Rubik's cube. He first filmed himself solving the cube, and then, knowing exactly how many moves it took him to solve the puzzle, he wrote a melody in which each pitch coincided with a turn of the cube. The music was then recorded in *GarageBand*[7] and the final project was shown as a pre-recorded video during the concert (see Video 3).

Once teachers and students have decided which type of performance they would like to create, planning ahead will yield the most successful result. In addition to the normal preparation time involved with preparing a solo work for performance, students must plan to work out the added details. They might need to experiment extensively with any additional technology and plan extra tech/dress rehearsals with the additional performers and equipment. Since both the teachers and students will need to know the capabilities of the performing space to plan for the event, booking the venue ahead of time is an imperative step. If this sounds intimidating to busy teachers, keep in mind that younger, tech-savvy students can help with the arrangements. They can play a key role on performance day—essentially, they can set things up and run the show.

This two-part exploration of possibilities in multimedia music merely

scratches the surface of the many opportunities awaiting our students. Considering these possibilities requires us as teachers to think beyond the nature of traditional music recitals, but the benefit of fostering creativity and musicality for our students should motivate us to explore new options. To create these types of musical performances, our students will not be wasting practice time—the additional components of the performance will instead require them to understand the music they create more fully. They will be focused on adding elements that contribute to the character and mood of the music and will prepare these performances based on musical parameters they must practice during traditional lessons and recitals. Most importantly, enhancing learning experiences and performances in these ways will engage modern students and audiences in meaningful ways.

Notes

1. As defined in Part I of this series, the term "multimedia music" refers to the combination of music with graphics or other media.

2. Courtney Crappell, Brendan Jacklin & Clinton Pratt, "Using Multimedia to Enhance Lessons and Recitals, Part I," *American Music Teacher* 64, no. 6 (June/July 2015): 10–13.

3. These software titles are available online at the following links: Microsoft *Office*, www.products.office.com; Apple *Keynote*, www.itunes.apple.com; *Prezi*, www.prezi.com (accessed May 11, 2015).

4. Airturn pedals are available online here: http://www.airturn.com/bluetooth-pedals (accessed May 11, 2015).

5. The hardware required to present slideshows matches the requirements discussed in Part I of this series. The required components include a laptop computer or tablet and a connection to a projector or other large display.

6. MusicAlive! is an annual multimedia concert in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area featuring the piano students of Clinton Pratt, one of the authors of this article.

7. This software is available for purchase online here: Apple, www.itunes.apple.com (accessed May 11, 2015). ■

BONUS BYTE

To see the playlist of the videos mentioned, visit the Bonus Bytes page: www.mtna.org/american-music-teacher/bonus-bytes/.

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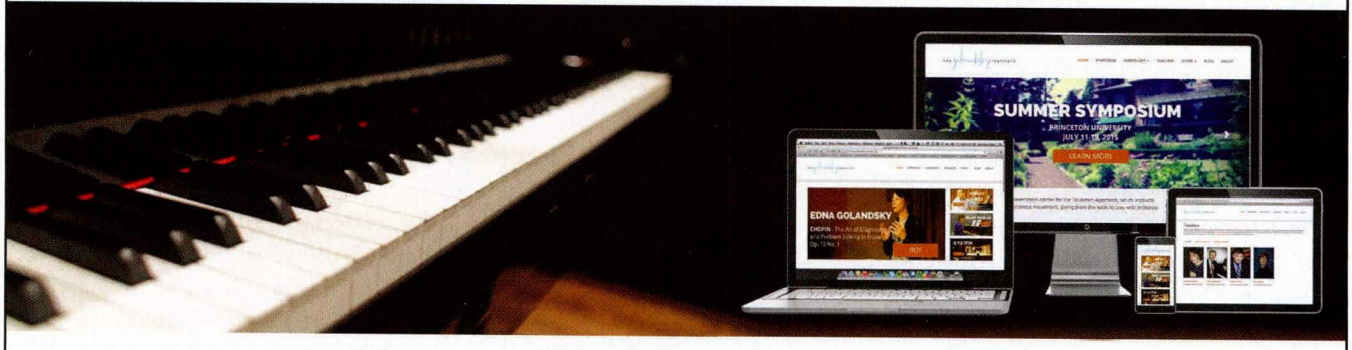

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