Techniques for Improving Your Concentration

I - THE TECHNIQUE OF IMPATIENCE

Purpose: To inhibit the obsessive pattern of playing over and over what is not yet worth repeating.

Step 1 - Pick a part to improve. Try a strategy you know.

Step 2 - If after 3 or 4 tries, you cannot improve it, STOP! Express your impatience - "There MUST be an easier way, a better way." Do not operate on the assumption that if you keep playing something incorrectly, it will in some miraculous way correct itself.

Step 3 - If you want to continue to work on the same part, to improve the same quality, these are your options.

a) Try The Technique of Success at Any Cost (see II below.)

b) Create a new strategy.

c) Call a friend or your teacher for advice.

d) Put it aside to try again tomorrow.

II - THE TECHNIQUE OF SUCCESS AT ANY COST

Purpose: To set a goal which can be achieved now without physical strain and without palinioiac repetition.

Step 1 - Pick a section to improve.

Step 2 - Decide what quality you will aim to improve, i.e., intonation, tone, rhythm, coordination, expression.

Step 3a - If you cannot improve it in 3 or 4 tries, simplify the goal until it is achievable without undue strain. Use one or more of the following approaches:

a) decrease the tempo;

b) remove the rhythm / play only the pitches;

c) remove the pitches / play only the rhythm;

d) design a better fingering;

e) decrease the quantity of material;

f) simplifying the phrasing, redesign the slur pattern;
g) shadow bow and sing the phrase;

h) finger the notes and shadow bow;

i) lower the intensity of emotional expression; etc.

The "cost" or the price you pay is that you must lower your expectations. In fact, you will improve more quickly than you would have if you had continued to fill time with repeated failing efforts. But, at first, it will feel that you are progressing more slowly.

** When you have achieved your first success, acknowledge it by saying to yourself, out loud: "GOOD JOB, __________!"

Step 3b - If you cannot improve it by any of the above, pay the ultimate price, change your expectations entirely by going on to something else. You can try again tomorrow, or you may need more information - wait for your lesson, call your friend, etc.

III - THE TECHNIQUE OF INTIMACY

Purpose: To stabilize your new success, until you are so accustomed to the newly successful way that it feels automatic, as if your body is doing it for you (takes at least 4 days.)

Step 1 - Try to repeat your newly achieved success (Technique of Success At Any Cost) 5 times correctly. In other words, become more intimate with your new success. Keep track of the number of times you succeed [✓] and the number of times you fail [✗].

Step 2a - If you can repeat the new quality 5 times correctly within 10 tries. Put the passage away for today, and try it tomorrow without increasing the goal.

Step 2b - If it takes more than 10 tries to repeat the new quality 5 times correctly, STOP! Redefine your goal. You bit off more than you could chew.

Step 3a - If you were successful at Step 2a, try to achieve 5 correct repetitions on each of 4 successive days. By the 4th day you have achieved 5 correct repetitions for 5 tries. If you achieve 5 for 5 before the 4th day, continue to repeat your success without demanding more until the 4th day to become increasingly confident of your control. You are now ready to set a new goal.

Step 3b - You fail to achieve 5 correct repetitions for 5
n.b. The idea of Intimacy replaces the idea of Training. Too often, practitioners are willing to train, i.e., to repeat over and over a part which is improved but is physically or tonally uncomfortable. "Would you go out on a second date with someone who made you physically uncomfortable or whose vibrations were not positive?", I ask. The idea is not to become intimate with (to repeat) a passage that is not pleasurable in tone, and body comfort.

III - THE TECHNIQUE OF SELECTIVE INATTENTION

Purpose: To pay attention only to the qualities you have chosen to improve in a passage at the expense of other qualities in that same passage.

Step 1 - Pay attention to only one problem at a time. It is most profitable to concentrate on the quality that is most out of balance first.

Beware the voice of your "Interior Nasty." Your IN will try to seduce you to improve more than one quality at a time. Rather than pay attention to the demands of your IN, focus more completely on the single problem you've chosen.

Step 2 - When you have increased control in one area, stop paying attention to it, i.e., select it out, and choose another problem on which to focus your concentration. Do not be disappointed or surprised if you lose some of the control you just gained.

Step 3 - Continue to cover each problem individually for 3 or 4 days. As you continue to select out all but one problem at a time, you will find that the qualities you've worked on individually begin to come together by themselves.

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