

THE CONDUCTED MOMENT

LESSONS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF MUSIC
FROM MIME AND THE THEATRE

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“You must come onto the stage instead of the composer...and compose in public.”
—Mstislav Rostropovich

- Do we *play* the composition, or do we *create* the composition?
- Do we rediscover the intricacies of choice in why one note follows another note each time we perform, or do we only present a skilled recital of the notes and meters of the composition?
- Do we make an *emotional connection*, from within our own lives and from what we have observed and experienced from others, that drives the notes we play, or do we simply play the notes with great skill, and then *hope* for some emotional connection in ourselves and in our audiences?
- Why, when a great conductor or musician presents a familiar composition, do we hear the notes as though it were for the first time?
- How do we teach our students to make public to their audiences, the monumental feelings, emotions, and truths awakened within their souls when performing great works of music?

The moment of performance is a delicate creature.

For the moment to occur, all the elements that surround each performance must be in harmony and focused toward the communication and completion of each moment. Only then may the circle be created. The circle is the great circle of communication that ebbs and flows between performers and audiences. It is the circle of our emotional connection to our work, to ourselves, to others, to our composers—and always, always, to our audiences.

INTRODUCTION: EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

IN THE ARTS, WHAT YOU ARE SHOWS THROUGH WHAT YOU DO.

- When you cease to use the body for communication, then you may cease to study the arts of the body.
- To move someone emotionally, you must move them physically.
- Communication cannot only take place during the “important” moments. Communication must be a constant if trust and connection of any profound nature is to occur.

For communication to be a constant, we must exist fully in the present moment. In life, we anticipate a moment that is coming; we have a plan and expectation for what that moment will be like and how it will feel; and finally, after the moment has passed, we spend an inordinate amount of time reflecting on how it went. And while we are busy doing that, the present moment continues to exist, uncared for and unloved.

What is the emotional responsibility of the community of players to their audiences?

TORSO

THE BODY AND THE TRUNK

The impulse from the torso is crucial for providing personal connection, power, and meaning to gesture, thought, and note. It is our physical connection with our torso that establishes our work as a thing of the heart and not of the head.

- The torso – the locus, the core, the where, the source for human experience
- *“Arms can lie, hands can lie, faces can lie, but the torso will always tell you the truth.”*

—Etienne Decroux

- The degree and amount of the torso’s response to stimulus is directly proportional to how profoundly we are affected by the stimulus.
- Vulnerability and the open torso

PROJECTION

Projection is the ability to fill the space around us with ourselves, with our own energy and personality and mood, and with the essence and atmosphere of the composition being played.

*When we send our inner energy beyond the range of our gestures,
we send ourselves beyond ourselves.*

- Relationship to space – Relationship to others – Relationship to gesture – Relationship to the music
- Actors create characters. Musicians create atmospheres.

THE CONNECTED GESTURE

EVERY GESTURE IS MUSIC AND EVERY MOVEMENT IS A GESTURE.

- The farther the gesture extends from the torso, the greater the emotional risk.
- The size of the gesture does not determine its importance. Rather, it is the information the gesture carries that will determine its significance.
- The gesture, disconnected from the torso, is a lie. Like the automatic movement of musicians, not connected to any internal response of stimulus, the gesture has no basis of emotional connection with the music being played.
- Vulnerability and the connected gesture (open, closed, the blow, the caress)

BREATH AND THE COMMUNICATION OF EMOTION

If we could only wait, just wait—wait for the decision of our heads to be inhaled into becoming an impulse from our torsos and from our hearts—then every action, every breath, and every note we sound would carry all our hopes, dreams, and fears, expressed for us and for our audiences in the compositions we play.

- We inhale stimulus and exhale response.
- A relaxed face is the most effective canvas for supporting subtle messages of interpretation and feeling, and the free interchange of breath to the gesture.
- A gesture, unsupported by breath, is an empty, disconnected fragment of the message.
- A gesture without breath support becomes only a demonstration of an emotion. Emotion demonstrated, and not felt, is a lie.

SELF-SCULPTURE AND RESISTANCE

Resistance is found everywhere in music, from the counterpoint in compositions, to the silence and stillness of the rest caught between different pressures, to the drag of the bow on every string instrument, to the push of breath against the tubes of the horns or the breath pushing against the constriction of the reeds of the woodwinds, to the clash of cymbals and the force of strike of mallet and stick, to the gesture of the baton, to finally, the very moment of physical choice to play or not to play.

- Resistance is one force moving against another force.
- Resistance is the definition of opposition, and opposition is the essence of drama.
- As you move through the air, you leave a shape in space.

THE SENSES

Our senses, operating at full capacity, aligned to our personalities and our histories, are the conduit through which pass our connection and response to our world, to our work, and to our art. In performance, with the objective of reaching out into the darkness and into the hearts and souls of strangers, our senses both receive and offer the messages in the air that are carried on the notes of music performed and the energy that returns from the audience in response to the performance. Our entire lives are with us in every moment of existence and need only the smallest nudge to dolphin upwards towards the light.

- It is never just information that returns through our senses, but rather a continual stream of real and imagined images, memories, thoughts, and ideas stimulated by and carried in the sensory information we are receiving.
- Our personal sensory alignment is part of the active definition of who we are and what we do.
- The five senses – hear, smell, taste, touch, and sight
- The personalization of space

RESPONSIBILITY

In performance, you serve as an empath for your audience. You feel so that your audience may feel. Remember, your audience will always be willing to rise up and follow you anywhere—as long as you lift them slowly and they feel they are in safe hands.

CONCLUSION

“I think of a tale by Olaf Stapledon, Last and First Men. It begins in the manner of the science fiction romances one reads in Astounding Stories, but then it grows and grows, and it ends in speculations almost too vast to comprehend. Mr. Stapledon traces the progress of mankind through eons of triumph and despair. At last, untold billions of years hence, when the universe is darkening down to its final end, a great teacher sums up the meaning of human life. ‘It was like a melody,’ he says.

That is our story. We are here for a little while between mystery and mystery. We live for a little time on this earth that is so fair. Could we, here, protean as we are; could we sense for a brief moment the melody of our being? And having sensed it, could we impart it to our fellow men? Follow this dream into the light. The road is long but the rewards at the end are greater than you know. Take with you as you go the words of Plato:

‘For those who have once set foot upon the upward pilgrimage do not go down again to darkness and to journey beneath the earth, but they live in light, always.’”

—Robert Edmund Jones

Godspeed you all in your work.
—Bud Beyer

BUD BEYER

Bud Beyer, Professor Emeritus in Theatre, Northwestern University, joined the faculty in 1972 and served as head of the Acting Program until 1989, when he was chosen to chair the Department of Theatre. He stepped down as chair in 2002, and retired from Northwestern in 2008. Professor Beyer was also Founder and Director of the Northwestern University Mime Company established in 1972, which toured extensively throughout the United States and Europe. A member of SAG, AEA, and AFTRA, Bud has professional credits as an actor, director, and theatre manager, and he has taught intensive scene study for professional actors in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. He has conducted workshops in mime and acting for colleges, universities, and festivals across the United States. He published, with Charlotte Lee, *Speaking of Theatre* (Scott Foresman and Company, 1974). He is also author of *Completing the Circle: Considerations for Change in the Performance of Music* (GIA, 2014). He was featured in *The New Generation of Acting Teachers* written by Eva Meckler (1988) and *Acting Teachers of America*, a vital tradition by Ronald Rand and Luigi Scorcica (2007).

During the past thirty years, Bud has presented lectures and workshops on gesture and movement for orchestral and band conductors throughout the country. He gave yearly residencies at the University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. In recent years, he has been working with professional musicians and has given workshops for entire orchestras, singers, instrumentalists, and conductors in Norway. He is working with the Grieg Academy in Bergen and with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra in Oslo, exploring new approaches to the training of musicians and the performance of music. A Norwegian research and performance project, EUIPAF (The Explosive, Unforeseeable Instant of Musical Performance: Applications and Foundations), will examine artistic projects in collaboration with Bud and his concepts and process for emotional connection within the framework of musical interpretation and performance. A thirty-minute documentary of his work, *Smile, You Have an Audience*, is available on Norwegian Educational Television.

In 2013, Bud wrote *Sirkelen Sluttes: Bevisstgjøring og Endring i Formidling av Musikk*, published in Norwegian through Universitetsforlaget in Oslo. In January of 2014, he directed a project with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra. The final performance was an acclaimed production of *Verklärte Nacht Opus 4* (1899) by Schoenberg. This work was followed with a new production with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra of Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen für 23 Solostreicher* (1944-45) in the Spring of 2015.

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE

Considerations for Change in the Performance of Music

BUD BEYER

“The most difficult and complex activity in life is the act of communication.”

—Bud Beyer

What can a professional actor, mime, and head of the storied theater department at Northwestern University teach to musicians and conductors?

A great deal.

This amazing and practical book is the culmination of years of experience Bud Beyer developed while working with musicians from around the world—and beginning with Northwestern’s own legendary conductor, *John Paynter*.

Topics covered include musicianship as communication, memorization, the art of practice, the act of performance, and the connections between musicians and audiences. Central to the book are creative exercises designed to help musicians reconnect emotionally to themselves, to their colleagues, to their work, and to their audiences.

After all, why do audiences come to the concert hall? Bud Beyer writes that “they come for hope—hope that, in the rarest of moments, they would find in the music a connection with themselves, with each other, and with the tone and dream they have searched for all their lives... hope that the dynamic of the performance would not be us, passively, watching you search, but would rather be us, together, searching for the same dream.” When all of us come together through music, the circle is truly complete.

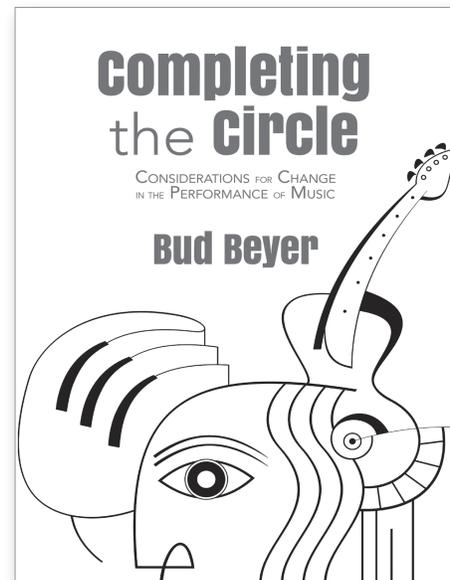


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Bud Beyer is a frequent clinician and a Professor Emeritus in Theatre from Northwestern University. He served as head of the Acting Program from 1972 until 1989, when he was named Chair of the Department of Theatre, a position he held until 2002.

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