

THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGING

by Greg Hyslop

As a professional instrumentalist for over forty five years, I will likely surprise young music students with the following idea: singing may be the most important skill you can develop which will make you a better musician.

As a private guitar teacher, I am amazed by the number of students who seem to approach their instruments as machines instead of logical extensions of themselves. Granted, every instrument requires a great deal of mechanical ability in order to produce good results. But all too often, we forget the sounds we are searching for must originate from somewhere within. The reason sight singing and ear training are crucial aspects of a quality music curriculum is due to the belief that the skills acquired in those courses will directly benefit the student/performer.

Often, I hear a student make the following statement: "If I could only play what I hear, I would be awesome!" So, why can't a student hear anything? Most of the time, it is due to a lack of exposure to a particular style of music. If that is the case, the student needs to listen to lots of recordings of the style he wishes to perform. Think of the brain (ear) as a fallow field in need of seeding and watering by countless recorded examples. Through intense listening, the student should be inspired to speak with satisfactory results.

The concept of playing what you can sing may be practiced with simple songs at first and then later with more complex melodic ideas. Especially with rhythms, singing can be a great way to work out problems beforehand. Singing the rhythm you failed to play correctly can help fix the problem the next time. Students playing instruments which don't require airflow can sing and play simultaneously. Vocalizing helps immensely with most musical challenges we might encounter including pitch, rhythm, dynamics and articulation. For aspiring young improvisers, singing can be a great way to get your feet wet without having to worry about fingerings or other technical issues of your instrument. Of course, it does help to have some kind of chordal accompaniment while you experiment with your melodic phrases.

In conclusion, singing can be a highly effective tool for expressing your inner musical self and reinforcing all aspects of confident performing. The goal shouldn't be to produce instrumentalists with stellar vocal qualities but rather to enable students to truly play what they hear.