

Sound

The Art of Music is the act of decorating sound over time. Despite this fact, I am surprised at the numbers of musicians who do not hold quality and beauty of sound as their number one "aesthetic ethic". Sound exists in perfection on its own. As soon as a second Sound is made, relationship and comparison are born. The second Sound begets a feeling of rhythm and a sense of intonation (as related to the first Sound). Too often it seems that we are obsessed with the relative aspects of sound via comparison and not focused enough on the quality and personal nature of the Sound itself. Sound is why I play the bass, and sound is why I choose to play the double bass, specifically with a bow. At the most basic level the satisfaction that I get from playing has to do with sound production in an acoustic context. Plugging into a wall of Marshall stacks and blowing the roof off of an arena is surely a powerful experience, but there is something direct and primal for me about participating directly and intimately in the quality and quantity of the production of Sound.



Sound is often described as having size (big/small), density (transparent/focused), and visual contrast (light/dark). Unless you happen to have synesthesia (physically seeing color while hearing sound) this is still an abstract exercise. It can be valuable, however, to try to get as specific as possible with your "sound color" choices. In

Western Classical Music there may be more narrow expectations of sound types/ qualities and certain stylistic norms as compared to other genres, but there is still the opportunity for a deeply personal and individual sound within that context. I was fortunate to have the experience of a visual IRL that I felt corresponded to my concept of sound. While running the mountains pre-dawn, the sun began to crest over a distant range. As I looked to the sky, I noticed that the colors evoked a feeling that corresponded to how I wanted to think of my Sound. The Western sky was a deep purple that progressed to crimson, orange, and finally brilliant yellows and white. This for me was a perfect visual metaphor for the rich and resonant fundamental (purple), the powerful core (crimson), and the sparkling overtones (yellow and white). Subsequently I was able to put a name to the specific purple in my mind: Pantone 19-2312 TPX Crushed Violets.



PANTONE
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Three Minds in Practice

If performing is a physical act, executed with intention, in the medium of Sound, then we have to look at training all 3 of these aspects when practicing. Technique is the realm of the physical, Intention is of the mind, and Sound is of the ear. I like to begin each practice day with open strings to focus on all 3 aspects, but there is a specific procedure that I follow that can help explore the possibilities of sound.

-Awaken the string. Focus on purity of sound and clarity of resonance. Strive for a wide, free oscillation. A body scan is essential in each of these steps to insure that you are not harboring excess tension. A basic understanding of string physics can enhance this process, but it is not absolutely necessary except at an advanced level.

-Awaken the bridge. Visualize transferring the energy from the string to the bridge. The feet of the bridge rock up and down, and picturing this motion can help focus you on pulling and pushing the energy ACROSS the bridge rather than pressing into the bass.

-Awaken the top. Feel the movement of the bridge interacting with top of the instrument. Imagine waves of vibration coming from the feet of the bridge and moving every inch of the top.

-Connect with the back. This may be a new experience for some. American Soprano Lindsay Kesselman describes an open sound as living BEHIND their head as if they were creating a larger and larger resonating space to cultivate their sound. Picture

the vibrations from the top connecting with the back of the instrument. As you do this, imagine that the back is opening out like the doors of a large wardrobe except that instead of a vague Christian allegory inhabiting that space you are creating a space behind the instrument that contains one of the World's great concert halls.

-Putting it together. Berlin Philharmonic Principal Bass Matthew MacDonald has a fantastic visual for sound: Imagine that all of the parts are coming together to create light that is shining out from the F-holes that becomes brighter and brighter, more and more powerful. Eventually this energy is so strong that it envelops the entire instrument causing it to disintegrate, and all that is left is pure Sound.

My hope is that these images and procedures will help give you a framework for exploring your own concept of Sound. One word of caution however: whatever you do, DO NOT accept the Turkish delight.



FRACTAL FRIDAY TOPICS!

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

NEXT FORUM:

March 3/14 @ 10AM PT Answering your repertoire questions + other topics

SPECIAL GUESTS!

Paul Ellison 3/21

Joel Quarrington 4/18

FRACTAL BASSIST is available on a limited basis for one-on-one lessons and group classes.

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With Love,

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