

Student Success in the Music Department

Music Presentation at Epworth Elementary

On Oct. 11, I had the exceptional opportunity to speak at Epworth Elementary, Epworth, Iowa, for 200 students about music composition and how music can affect our emotions, specifically in relation to film. During the presentation, I was able to describe my actual writing



process and what a composer has to think about before and during the construction of a piece of music. I showed the students how I generally write a piece of music by first starting with a melody, then adding a bass line, percussion and what I called “fun” instruments, including an Egyptian Saz and Mandolin, which the students were very excited to hear about. I also talked to the students about improvisation and how I will sometimes pick random notes



and just make a piece of music. To demonstrate this, I called upon four students to each name a different note in the musical alphabet (A-G) and then played a short piece on the piano using the selected notes as my main melody. To explain how music can affect our emotions and interpretation of a scene in a film, I rewrote music for a clip from the film *Despicable Me*, in which Steve Carrell’s character infiltrates

the villain’s base with “cookie” robots. One of the music scores was fit for a horror film and instantly the students knew this was not correct for the scene, but when I played them the alternate version that felt like a spy mission and more whimsical, they all agreed it matched much better and made the scene comical rather than making “cookie” robots uncomfortably sinister. My goal was to make the students appreciate how much music affects us emotionally and how it can change our perception of a certain situation just by using different notes.

Lastly, I talked to the students about a recording technique sometimes referred to as psychoacoustic recording, which is



to take an ordinary sound and completely alter its sound perception. I first demonstrated this idea by creating a “human rainstorm.” I had all of the students follow my actions such as rubbing their hands together, snapping, and tapping their legs to mimic different aspects of a rainstorm. I then played a recording of a vacuum cleaner and had the students guess what the sound was, which, of course, they all knew. After that, however, I played a recording of the same sound, but in reverse and with a few special effects and asked the same question, “What is this sound?” I got all sorts of answers, ranging from trains to spaceships and the students



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were quite surprised when I told them it was actually the same recording.

I was so impressed with the students and truly overjoyed with the many questions and continued curiosity after I had finished. I have often been told that sharing our knowledge and love of our craft is some of the most important work we can do as creative artists and I could not agree more. I was extremely fortunate to spend a little extra time after the presentation with my aunt’s class who actually used some of my music as inspiration for their creative writing exercises. As a composer or artist, there is nothing greater than hearing someone get excited or even inspired by your work, no matter what age because you never know how far a little inspiration will carry someone. Having the chance to share my greatest passion in the world with young students was an absolute pleasure and I would do it again in a heartbeat.

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