

Course Reflection

MUAP 362 - 002: Crane Symphony Orchestra Violin Sectionals

Fall 2016

In this course, I worked with all the violinists in Crane Symphony Orchestra in their weekly sectional. This is the time during the week when the violins can really dig into passages that give them particular trouble in the larger tutti rehearsals. My goal with this course was to not only improve violin passage-work but also to create a nurturing and compassionate environment in which the students could really come together as a section and find a beautiful group sound. Often in an orchestral violin sectional, there can be feelings of competitiveness, jealousy and the desire to "prove" oneself which often stem from the results of the seating audition. Being in a professional string orchestra myself, I wanted to open students up to the experience of being able to trust each other and to feel like they are all on the same team just as I do in my own work. In order to do this, I decided to spend a little bit of time during each class working on blend and group sound by taking sections of CSO music and doing listening exercises. I often moved the students around the room so that they were constantly standing by different people and hearing different sounds. We worked on strategies for getting out of the music and listening across the section. I also wanted to create a "safe" environment in which students could really "go for things" in their playing without worrying about messing up. I think this is one of the most powerful ways to grant ownership to a group of players because it invites them to "buy in" to the group product. I have found that the risk of messing up in a large rehearsal creates a timidity in one's playing which actually results in more mistakes not to mention a far less unified section sound. By building this group trust, we were able to demonstrate a confidence in the violin section by the first concert of the semester which only improved with each performance.

Some things I would do differently:

1. I would make sure to have my students do course evaluations. Being a first-time faculty, I did not realize how intense the schedule would be during the last two weeks of the course with Candlelight Week and Levels Week. Since the students were in intensive tutti rehearsals every evening of what would have been the final week of CSO, the conductor, Peter Folliard and I decided to give the violins a bit of rest by not having sectionals during that week – as many of them were on the verge of dealing with playing-related injuries. This meant that while I worked with the students during Candlelight Week rehearsals, we did not meet at our usual sectional time – which I realized in retrospect would have been the opportunity to have them fill out course evaluations. The final week of classes (also known as Levels Week at Crane), Crane Symphony Orchestra did not meet at all which I was not expecting. Now that I have experienced the typical fall semester at Crane, I will know what to expect in those finals weeks of class when the schedule is a bit different and will be able to plan to pass out course evaluations accordingly.