

February, 2022

Art, Artist, and Audience

Later this month, I am heading to New York City to speak to students at the Juilliard School about the ways in which The College Music Society is changing the musical landscape they will soon navigate. Extending my stay, I also plan on soaking in some of the amazing art this one-of-a-kind city has to offer. What I hadn't considered until now, however, are the connections between what I will share in my talk and why I've chosen to attend the events I have during my short visit.

The talk (*The Art of Hope*) challenges students to develop the mindsets (alongside the skill sets) needed to succeed in our profession and in life: urging them to foster their curiosities, harness their creativity, hone their collaborative skills, and lean into their grit. It hopes further to remind them of the work their art does in the world and in the lives' of their audience.

Here's an excerpt.

As hard as it is to define, every musician has felt the transformative, connective powers of the artistic experience. For me, this was never more evident than a recent trip to New York City to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra perform Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*.

When my children turn 16 years old, my gift to them is an experience of their choosing. When my daughter Mary Pauline, a violinist, turned 16, this was a trip to Carnegie Hall to hear what many would regard as the world's most revered string section perform the most compelling work ever written for strings.

The evening began with a lovely dinner at an upscale restaurant, with Mary Pauline, my wife Laura, and me all dressed to the nines. The concert was to be held at one of the truly historical venues, and I was sharing the experience with the two musicians I love most—my only daughter and my beautiful wife. Nothing could be more perfect.

Upon the downbeat of Barber's masterpiece, I turned to watch Mary Pauline's face light up as the unison violins sounded the opening note, and already I could see tears streaming down her cheeks. I turned to cue my wife so she too could see the emotion of her daughter, only to realize that Laura, as well, was weeping.

This is the artistic moment. A connective moment and realization of all that is embodied within Barber's work—pain, sadness, fear, sorrow, grief, tenderness, joy, and hope. Barber had created a work that expresses the emotions at the core of the human experience.

What I hope students gain from the talk is a deeper understanding of the connections between the transformative experiences they create through their music and how those experiences can inspire their audiences when navigating life's most challenging moments.

Life imitating art.

It has always been my belief that creativity resides at the thin line between hope and despair. And as we move through life's journey, and face the inevitable, the imminent challenges that will come our way, we can benefit from turning to the creativity within ourselves so that we might right our paths, forge new ways forward, and invent a more hopeful future.

Hopeful to refuel my creative energies and become inspired by the art of others, I plan on viewing the Jasper Johns exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Johns's use of common objects—most notably the American flag—upended conventional notions of what art can be. Said to care more deeply about the process of making art than the finished product, Johns's work makes art and artmaking accessible to broad audiences by inviting those who experience and make art for the joy of it to see themselves within his celebrated work.

My wife and I plan on going to one of NYC's most historical jazz venues to listen to Tyshawn Sorey perform with Joe Lovano and Bill Frissel. Sorey—a 2017 MacArthur “Genius” Grant awardee and a collaborator of mine on Awadagin Pratt's forthcoming album *STILLPOINT*—exudes creativity that extends far beyond any one instrument, medium, genre, or way of thinking. An evening of spontaneous composition in the intimate setting of the Village Vanguard is good for one's mind, body, spirit, and soul.

We're going to Broadway to see *Come from Away*, the true story of more than 7,000 unexpected visitors and the town—Gander, Newfoundland—that cared for them in a moment of uncertainty and fear. Never surprised, but always amazed at the ways in which musicals can tell stories that deal with emotions and moments so complex that they can only be told in song, I can't wait to witness how these chance meetings transform from forgein to forged, unexpected to indelible.

So why these choices when visiting the city that never sleeps? Truth be told, there are many great choices. But the balance of these: the welcoming familiarity of Johns's work, the in-the-moment excitement of Sorey's artistry, the simplicity within a story realized through the complexity of us all, all allow me to feel more: more connected, more joyful, more hopeful, and more safe in a world that stills feels so uncertain. And that is the beauty of our art. So let's keep making it.

Thanks for joining the conversation.

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