

The Walden School Musicianship Course: A Manual for Teachers

Edited by Paul Nauert (with contributions by Nansi Carrol, Stephen Coxe, Carol Thomas Downing, David Hogan, Tom Lopez, Patricia Plude, Carol Prochazka, Pamela Layman Quist, and Leo Wanenchak)

Paul Hindemith was a genius. A remarkable performer, composer, and teacher. He cast a singular shadow over the world's musical landscape. It was justifiably assumed that he would eventually enter into the pantheon of "great" composers. But his place of honor has yet to be established and – this is not a criticism – it is doubtful that his works will ever be considered part of the standard orchestral repertoire.

Despite his catalogue of interesting, passionate, and beautiful compositions, his lasting contribution to music was his "Elementary Training for Musicians" (European American Music Dist Corp; ISBN #0901938165). The book is used today – and should be: it is a prodigious accomplishment, a testament to the genius of a first-class musical mind.

One of Hindemith's protégés at the University of Minnesota, Paul Fetler, endorsed it to all his students who considered themselves "serious" composers. My composing teacher at Cornell College, Alf Houkom, would take his upper-class students down a peg by asking them to sight-read the two-part rhythmic etudes. I ran the gauntlet of spiky rhythmic and melodic musical exercises in the pages of my dog-eared copy.

But Hindemith's "Elementary Training for Musicians" has new competition. The teacher-training program and manual recently produced by The Walden School (in Dublin, New Hampshire) is one of the finest programs for young composers in the world. A few years ago, I was composer-in-residence at The Walden School's "festival week" where I was exposed to the Walden School musicianship training.

Walden's musicianship course was developed by the legendary Grace Newsom Cushman, who was working at the Peabody Conservatory and Preparatory School in the late 1960s. During this time of intellectual ferment, several innovative music methods were created, including the Manhattanville Music Project, which placed students' experiential learning at the center of the pedagogical plan.

Ms. Cushman founded the Junior Conservatory Camp (JCC) as an outgrowth of her work at Peabody and later trained two Conservatory students, David Hogan and Pamela Layman Quist, in her method. In 1972, they co-founded The Walden School with Lynn Taylor Hebden, who had been a colleague and champion of the courses at Peabody. Ms. Cushman died in 1972 before seeing, in The Walden School, the full flowering of her pioneering work.

The teacher's manual lays out the musicianship course as a flowchart (sometimes resembling a trek or a ski run or a marathon) for composers and music educators. Its content is the product of 9 musical minds: Nansi Carroll,



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The chapter titles sound predictably theoretical: acoustical foundations, intervals, major and minor triads, cycles, pentatonic modal system, Dorian modal system, modal harmony, toward functional harmony, functional harmony, computer musicianship, and creative work. What distinguishes this book -- and the reason music teachers should attend The Walden School training this summer in Santa Clara, CA -- is the interplay between Discovery, Drills (ear and eye), and Creative Work.

For nearly a year, I have used the book in my composition teaching; the manual is especially helpful in class settings. I got hooked on the method from the first chapter. Three standout features: 1) It starts with the wonderfully provocative question, "What is music?" and continues in the form of a Socratic dialogue. 2) By the third page of the dialogue, students are experiencing the physics of sound on the piano. 3) Improvisation "inside" the piano is the first exercise in creative work; the keyboard is "out of bounds."

Traditional theory is given a thorough treatment (e.g. intervals, modal and functional harmony), but the suggested interactions between discovery and drill are very helpful and informed by decades of experience. The creative work is where the fun really resides in this book: the exercises are so good they may inspire you to write your own responses.

Just as the ascendancy of piano technology and music publishing helped to establish a golden age of music in Germany and Austria 250 years ago, computer music is our era's technological revolution. The chapter on computer musicianship, by Tom Lopez, is one of the clearest teaching texts I know of. The elementary section of this chapter begins by asking students to close their eyes and to observe sound in time and then to organize it (the Walden definition of music). The intermediate level starts by recording, listening to, and then organizing whispered and hollered words in and out of doors. The advanced level begins with directed improvisations between sound files and live musicians. Composing is foundational to this explication of computer music -- it is not just a technical manual.

Each computer-music exercise invites students and teachers to invent; the open-ended instructions defy aesthetic constriction. Whether you are lucky enough to attend The Walden School in New Hampshire, or you're working in a public junior high school in Nebraska, this book and this approach to music-making is truly inspirational.

The Genius Syndrome that shapes our understanding of "classical" music today is not so much debunked by the Walden experience as it is simply ignored. The most prodigious accomplishment of The Walden School and its teacher training may be the encouragement to create a community of music-making, and this manual for teachers is the product of a community of authors, teachers and students.

-- Randall Davidson was composer in-residence at The Walden School in 2001. A recent CD entitled "Falls Flyer" features music by Davidson, Kim Sherman, Cary John Franklin, Daniel Kallman, and David Evan Thomas performed by guitarist Christopher Kachian and oboist Merilee Klemp. This CD can be purchased at www.cdbaby.com

Editors' note: "The Walden School Musicianship Course: A Manual for Teachers" is available for \$59.20 (postpaid). Send check or money order to The Walden School, 31A 29th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110. For more information and an order form, visit www.waldenschool.org/teacher/orderform.shtml



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