

All-State: The Inner Game of Music

presented by Barry Green — reported by Rolf Erdahl

Barry Green shared his inspiring, boundless curiosity, enthusiasm, and love of music in four sessions at the recent MNSOTA All-State Teachers' Workshop at the College of St. Benedict. I attended three of the four—Barry's open coaching session of the All-State Orchestra bass section, *The Inner Game of Music* workshop, and the introduction to his most recent book and area of inquiry, *Bringing Music to Life*.

Barry has been doing workshops on his *Inner Game* concepts for many years, and it was impressive to see him in action. He presented an overview of the ideas in the book, discussed his path of inquiry through his three books, and then coached several individuals and groups, using *Inner Game* concepts to improve performances. The *Inner Game of Music* is concerned with beating mental barriers to obtain optimal performance through three principles of relaxed concentration: Awareness, Commitment and Trust. In his coachings, he helped performers overcome "internal chatter" to focus on what they were there to do. A bassist who performed the Paganini *Moses Variations* chose to focus "Awareness" on articulation, and Barry added a focus on intonation. By simply observing note lengths and if the notes were high or low, the student was able to achieve more consistent articulation, correct intonation slips and reduce nerves. The next student, performing Lalo's *Cello Concerto*, chose to focus on dynamics and clarity of phrasing. Barry shifted the awareness to determining qualities of the music, moving from excitement to calm. This awareness moved to Green's "Trust" element, trusting in the qualities of music to come out in performance. The cellist then focused on the expression through dynamics, which coincidentally helped him sail through passagework that had seemed more labored in the initial performance. In both of the coaching sessions, Barry's suggestions seemed to throw a switch in the minds of the musicians that resulted in instantly improved performances.

While *Inner Game of Music* deals with approaches to overcoming mental hurdles, *Bringing Music to Life* takes a more visceral approach to projecting music by overcoming physical barriers to performance. Barry contends we're born singers, dancers and drummers, and somewhere along the

way we're taught to suppress these natural expressive modes. His new approach incorporates dance and movement, drumming, and breathing into musical training. Barry distills these into three areas: Breath (voice), Pulse (rhythm), and Movement (body). The first observations on breath had the most immediate impact, when simply opening the mouth to breath freely resulted in less restrained and choked-up playing. The other concepts required more time to bear fruit in performance, taking a little more time and effort both to learn and teach than the more immediate impact of employing *Inner Game* concepts. He worked with a string quartet, helping them free their body positions, open breathing, and establish a groove by feeling the subdivisions together. For a bassist performing the Capuzzi *Concerto*, he worked on singing and feeling the inner rhythm to express the music more freely. In the short time he had to work with players and ensembles, there were glimmers of performance breakthroughs, but it became clear that more time was needed to absorb the lessons taught.

Barry had more time and got more complete results from his extended work in the morning All-State Orchestra bass sectional. Barry started coaching using *Bringing Music to Life* concepts as well of some of his *Inner Game* ideas. His stated goal was for the performers to bring their selves and interpretations out through their instruments. Much as actors start from their body language in building performances, musicians can use movement to feel and express music. Green established a framework for doing this by brief improvisatory exercises to establish an inner rhythmic groove and freedom, breathing and movement warm ups, and by helping them decide what the music was about (internalizing it), and using breath, movement, and acting to project their personalities and understanding in performance (expressing it). After somewhat bemused and self-conscious starts, the talented student bassists really started to project their personality through their playing and ended the session moving from a whisper to a growl in an impressive bass section solo from Britten's *Young Per-*

son's Guide to the Orchestra. It showed the potential effectiveness of the approach both for private practice and in a classroom set-



Barry Green with All-State student

ting. Without extensive studies in mastering dance and movement, groove, African drumming, or martial arts, it is possible to incorporate elements of all of them to assist students in projecting personality in their playing. While many teachers and performers already do these things, Barry Green's seriously delightful study in *Bringing Music to Life* provides an organized framework for understanding and points out pathways for making the connection between body awareness and expression in performance.

Barry showed video examples of performers whose movements, breathing, and internalized rhythm helps channel their personal music making. Conductors Gustavo Dudamel, Michael Tilson Thomas, and artists Joshua Bell, Tito Puente, Oscar Peterson, Kristen Korb, Glenn Gould, and the Kronos Quartet were exemplars of Barry's dictum that, "The music inside you has to be louder than the music you're playing."

The greatest inspirations in Barry Green's presentations were his palpable love for music, his excitement in learning more, and his joy in sharing his ongoing journey of discovery. Sounds like the definition of a music teacher!

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