



TECHNOLOGY

Embracing the Power of YouTube in Your Studio

by Joel Salvo

At its outset, YouTube seemed destined to be nothing more than a pop-cultural fad. A decade later, it has evolved into something far more than a collection of video curiosities, but rather an indispensable tool for educators. One of the most obvious advantages to YouTube is the wealth of high-caliber classical performances available just a few clicks away and entirely free. However, beyond being a massive classical musical archive, YouTube can be used for so much more. For those of you who are already believers, I hope to encourage you to expand your usage beyond the typical, “let’s watch/listen to the piece I want you to learn.” For those of you who are not yet convinced, I hope to highlight some of the great ways that YouTube can be used to enhance a student’s learning experience.

Inspire Students

There is a collection of non-traditional string performance videos on YouTube that are able reach many young players where the standard repertoire cannot. I am not trying to be controversial or say that we should abandon efforts to refine students’ tastes. I am only stating that one has to admit that YouTube has created a platform for musical ingenuity that sparks curiosity in young string players. Students are continually uncovering all sorts of quirky performances. These videos quickly become a source of inspiration to practice or sometimes even their sole reason why they pick a particular instrument. I honestly must give credit to The Piano Guys videos (thepiano-guys.com) along with 2Cellos (2cellos.com) for several of my new beginning cello students.

In response to this, I have found it extremely valuable to devote time in a lesson to have students share some of their favorite videos. Avoid the temptation to quickly to dismiss students’ favorite videos of a break-dancing violinist or a beat-boxing cellist as not serious. Instead, get in the habit of “trading” videos. After they show you a video, then share a video that you find inspirational. With this balanced approach,

students tend to be more open to broadening their tastes. In addition, you can use their favorite videos to set goals. Tell them if they want to be able to play like the performer in the video, these are some exercises they will have to practice.

Develop Critical Thinking

Maybe you feel like I did during the early days of YouTube and cringe whenever a student would say they learned something from a random video. There is some shockingly (and many times laughably) bad advice on how to play the cello on YouTube. Students can be overly trusting of internet sources and may try to incorporate some of that bad advice into their playing. Despite this, I think it is unrealistic in this day and age to expect your students just to stay away from seeking out answers to questions online. Not to mention, there are some outstanding videos from some of the country’s top pedagogues that you would not want your students to miss. So, when the inevitable situation arises where a student comes across some dubious information, instead of immediately snapping, “That’s wrong,” switch to, “Let’s watch.” I have discovered that even the most flawed videos are opportunities for discussion that in turn, develop critical thinking skills in string students. By watching dubious videos together with students, you are able have an in-depth discussion on why some advice may be flawed. This practice gets students to think more critically about their playing and practicing. In addition, they will be better at filtering the good information from the bad when they are out searching for answers online.

Now, every so often even a video from a reputable source can be disruptive to your pedagogy. An example of this situation comes from when I was working with a student of mine on the angle of his wrist in relation to the bow. Of course, after several months of struggle and eventual butting of heads, he cited a video of Rostropovich that contradicted what I was asking him to do. Yes, I could have said what many

of teachers have said in the past, “It’s my way or the highway!” but I felt it was my responsibility to explain my thought process and show him counter examples of cellists who are models of what I teach. In the end, our discussion made me really examine my technical philosophy and helped my student feel more willing to adopt it.

Create a Virtual Teaching Assistant

I often say that in an ideal world, I would meet with my private students more than just one time a week. Sometimes a week is just too long to let some questions go unanswered, and sometimes there just is not enough time to get through everything you need to even in an hour lesson. YouTube presents a solution to this dilemma. By creating your own YouTube channel, you can essentially create a virtual teaching assistant that is entirely free, patient enough to repeat itself as many times as a student needs, and available anytime night or day.

Developing your own YouTube channel is easier than you might think. Also, maybe you are apprehensive about privacy, but having a presence on YouTube does not mean your videos have to be available to the general public. You can have your channel set as “Unlisted” so only the people you choose are able to find your content. In addition to videos, your channel can host discussion forums, and even live stream events, such as studio recitals for out-of-town family. All you need to get started is a Google account, a little time, and this web address: support.google.com/youtube.

After the initial setup, I have found the best way to structure a YouTube channel is through playlists. Playlists create placeholders for videos on topics you feel would be most beneficial to your studio. I like to create a playlist for each of the typical topics covered in a lesson. For example: Scales, Arpeggios, Bowing, Etudes, Repertoire. I also think its good to have a playlist devoted to great masterclasses and another for those off-the-wall student suggestions!

Once your playlists are in place, just

start adding videos. A playlist can hold the videos you make as well as the videos of other users. For refining your own videos, YouTube offers some great video editing features. You do not need any additional software. My favorite feature in the video editor allows me to add play-by-play text. So while I demonstrate a scale, the fingerings appear on the screen. (There is even a new feature that lets you convert your videos into 3D!) Granted, creating videos is

not a quick process, but it is really exciting to see your channel grow over time. With every new video you upload, you provide a trusted resource for your students while keeping your chops and teaching wits sharp. Once you have your own channel going, help your students to create their own. Their confidence will grow with each video posted and provide a clear narrative of their progress.

Joel Salvo is a regular guest of the Schubert Club Courtroom Concert series and has toured the U.S. with Trio Matisse (flute, harp, and cello). As a member of contemporary group Ensemble 61, he has performed on the SPCO's Liquid Music series and has been featured on MPR. He is professor of cello and bass, and orchestra director at St. Cloud State University. †