



CHAMBER MUSIC

Chamber Music for Yourself and Others

by Ray Shows

Prelude

As a teaching artist devoted to the field of *chamber music*, I am interested in using my passion for this great music to share ideas and solutions with others. Serendipitous exposure to this art form while in high school opened up possibilities for me to enjoy a lifelong relationship/career in chamber music and I want all young string players to have that same opportunity.

Here is a short list of some valuable life skills this powerfully intimate genre embraces; *accountability, clear communication, equal sharing of leadership, truth in performance*. To clarify, I'm referring to the required *responsibility* we must have to our colleagues each and every time we play with them; the importance of *communicating* musical ideas gleaned in the practice room before the rehearsal and new ones discovered *in* the rehearsal; making sure we highlight our part when the music asks us to and seek out ways to support our colleagues by making them sound terrific to an audience—a hallmark of *great leadership*. I'm also talking about presenting a *true performance*—a live musical statement that is representative of the composer's intentions and backed up with historical and social context. Combined with a stage presence that has conviction and an interesting storyline, these traits are the "special sauce" that ignites all great music making on stage.

Idea

Because of the essential educational value of chamber music, I would like to help teachers/students form chamber groups *at their high schools*. Why high schools? Most high school string players have reached a level of competence whereby they can begin to study and perform compositions that are truly magnificent (i.e. Haydn or Beethoven string quartets to name a few). Also, high school orchestra provides a critical mass of colleagues/friends to build ensembles that can rehearse and perform at school events, state solo & ensemble contest, and even regional/national competitions. Opportunities for learning and showcasing their work abound.

Challenge

Not every classroom is situated or scheduled the same way and I am certain the challenges, although topically similar, have unique aspects and nuanced solutions would be interesting to share and discuss. Also, compelling students (and their parents in some cases) to commit to several more hours of practice each week can be daunting.

Proposal

Through conversations and a brief questionnaire, I hope to identify the challenges of teaching chamber music in high schools and then share and amplify crowd-sourced ideas and solutions to help teachers bring students together into chamber groups. My *primary goal* is to expose more young people to the magnificent chamber music art form at a time in their life when they are open to absorbing new ways to "music." Chamber music study improves technical facility, musical understanding, and brings a heightened awareness to daily participation in school orchestra.

Questions

1. How have you created time in the orchestra curriculum to share with chamber music?
2. What do we need to know about logistics, room space, after school options?
3. What grade is best to introduce students to chamber music – 9th, 10th, 11th?
4. When putting groups together is it "Friend" driven or "Level" driven?
5. How do you choose music for the groups?
6. How do you inspire and motivate the students to add chamber music to their schedule?

Other ideas to consider?

I welcome all comments to this proposal and will share my findings in a subsequent issue. Here is the link to the online Google Form

<https://forms.gle/SUohXaYq47E2jFKr7>

You are also welcome to email me your answers and ideas directly. ray@artaria.us

Colombian-American violinist Ray Shows is an accomplished Chamber Musician and Arts Innovator with over three decades of creative experience performing, teaching, and administrating classical chamber programs and events. A McKnight performing artist award winner with the Artaria String Quartet, Ray is active in the chamber music community across the country both as a performer and teacher and is in demand as a professional resource for chamber musicians and music educators. He co-directs the Artaria Chamber Music School and is the founder and director of the nationally recognized Saint Paul String Quartet Competition. In 2010 he was honored with the MNSOTA Master Teacher: Studio award. †