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FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2011

Friday Fix: Are You a Victim of Artistic Identity Theft?

I think I figured it out. For most of my musical life, I've been baffled by a particular phenomenon. I'm talk about boring artists, classical musicians in particular. The term "Boring Artist" should be an oxymoron, but it turns out it's more common than you think. Once, I heard an amazing pianist. I had been waiting a while to hear her play, so I was pumped up for the performance (I'm very excitable for other artist's concerts). She was flawless in execution, and there was excitement to be found in watching this execution play out, I was impressed for sure. But after about 3 minutes, I quickly lost interest, found myself mentally whittling down a to-do list for an upcoming trip, and by the end I had to admit to myself that I hadn't been moved. What I do remember is she seemed uncomfortable, stressed, slightly annoyed and very uptight. She was playing tremendously difficult repertoire so I can't say that I blame her. But here's what I figured out:

She was being all of those things (stressed and impressive), but she wasn't being...herself.

As a result, I was bored because I wasn't gleaning anything from the performance aside from what her fingers were telling me. Nothing jumped off the page about the composer or the music and nothing leaped off the stage about her musical personality. Maybe that's because she wasn't getting anything either, other than a sense of, "Phew, I got through that". **She had no artistic identity.**

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Jade Simmons
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@flowjunkie's offering FREE sessions on Deliberate practice, breaking thru plateaus&performing under pressure!!'m in! R U?
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OMG, Artists! A seminar abt performing under pressure! Look who @flowjunkie has assembled 2 talk abt developing true grit <http://ht.ly/4Dpnt>
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So excited to be featuring the rebel that is @jrhodespianist on Thursday's show. U don't know him?Betta ask somebody! <http://ht.ly/4D2us>
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Identity is defined as whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable. Artistic Identity is whatever makes you worth seeing and hearing again!

I don't know about you, but I can look back over my current career and see entire seasons where I was doing the same thing, not being myself. Then, what was I doing? I was spending time trying to prove myself to be what "others" thought I should be and trying very hard not to be what I feared everyone might think I was...whatever that was! I had fallen victim to artistic identity theft. The worst part about it was that my way of thinking was the culprit.

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So why not be our true artistic selves? There are lots of good reasons. 1). **Because if we play too much Modern music (or Spanish music, or music by women, etc.), people will assume we can't play the "real stuff".** Even the other day I was practicing Liszt (the real, splashy, showy, fun, arpeggio-ridden kind) and my mom (who's still holding her breath for me to play the Khatchaturian Toccata again, the piece that I won tons of kiddie competitions with) exclaims, "Oh I love it when you play real Classical music!" Because I worried that people other than my mom would also think this way, my first few seasons I played nothing but the classics, not because I love that music (which I do), but mostly because it's what I thought people expected me to play in order to be deemed legitimate.

2). **We tamp down our other talents out of fear of having our multitalented-ness questioned or deemed a cover up for lack of true talent in performance.** I once had a manager ask me, "Well, what do we tell presenters when they ask us if you're a pianist, or a spokesperson, a fashion plate, or a writer or a webhost?" He was worried my "extras" would cast doubt on my "main". I say, tell them they're getting a freakin' amazing package deal!

3). **We do what every other Classical performer did before us, because that's all we know. Really, we only know half the story.** History books and biographies reveal that most of the stuffiness we bring to our concerts is not based on the true atmosphere of concerts from way back when. Women threw their dainty gloves on the stage (the equivalent of today's panty throwing antics) after Liszt performed, some even fainted. Only parts of sonatas were performed because even the guys who wrote this great music worried about lulling their audiences to sleep. Concerts in Scriabin and Kandinsky's day were multi-sensory, incorporating visual art and dance. Schumann and Brahms had literature and opinion published in journals of the day, they'd be bloggers if they were alive today. Mozart improvised more than he played from the score.

There is no reason we modern-day artists need to be walking around in a fog of undiscovered identity. Identity is defined as whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable. As artists we have to start defining what it means to be us! Then we have to recognize our truest talents and put those on display. How? **Play the music we're meant to play so we can be free to give the performance of a lifetime. Pursue the other interests that will strengthen our main brand as performers and provide viable outlets for creativity as well as lucrative inlets for income. Create performance experiences that go beyond standard recitals and instead provide a glimpse into our artistic personalities behind the music.**

What's the consequence for not discovering yourself first? Well, you run the risk of being discovered while you're not really being who you are and then having to live up to that false reproduction of yourself for the rest of your career.

Now, who wants that?

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Posted by Emerge Already! at 7:04 AM 

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