

I've Looked at Life From Both Sides Now—Some Thoughts on Selecting a Music Program

When John or Jane Q. Public thinks of the concept of college recruiting, his or her thoughts probably go straight to the three ring circus of big-time college sports. Football. Basketball. Baseball. Gymnastics. Tennis. Soccer. The list goes on and on.

Regardless of the sport, the coaching staff at any school is obsessed with the idea of recruiting the best athletic talent in the hopes of either improving or maintaining the strength of their program. Since college coaches seem to be hired only to eventually be fired, their livelihood rests on their recruiting acumen and demands that they spend a lot of time on attracting the right talent to their school. Their jobs depend on it.

I actually have a soft spot in my heart for the coaches that travel to rural outposts that happen to harbor a five-star linebacker or a lefty with a wicked curve. I often imagine them sitting in the living rooms, talking with Mom and Dad on the merits of their program and promising that they will take good care of their child if they land at their school (to the extent that this is possible... Google Athlete+Arrest for more details). I find that in the South, kids with promising athletic ability are treated like princes and princesses and are told from an early age that they are better than everyone else. So, when a dozen or more colleges come calling, the student athlete certainly feels as though they are in the driver's seat, because they are.

This soft spot that I have for these coaches is one bred of empathy, as music professors also know what it feels like to have their sense of self worth tied squarely to the decision of a seventeen year old. One of the primary roles of an applied music professor at the University of X, is to build and maintain an effective studio. While music professors aren't in the same boat as our coaching colleagues of being hired with the eventuality that they will be fired, if one proves that that they have a tough time recruiting as a young untenured assistant professor, their road will be wrought with uneasiness and their future will be less than certain. As a very famous brass teacher once said, "If you want to be known as a great teacher, teach great students." While this may sound a bit glib, there is more than a kernel of truth to that statement.

Since it is mid-March, both colleges and students are making decisions about admissions, scholarships and who is the best fit. Three weeks from this post, most of these decisions will be made and students will make commitments and send deposits to the schools of their choosing. However, the ensuing three weeks are wrought with uncertainty as students mull over their choices. Many times, the enticement of a \$XX,000 scholarship is enough to snare a student, because face it, everyone loves to be stroked. With apologies to Sally Field, cash is the great communicator of, "You like me... you REALLY like me!!"

Not all college teachers are blessed with a budget of \$XX,000. Not all are blessed with a budget of \$X,000. I had a chat with a colleague recently who told me that his school had a budget of less than \$1,000 for scholarships for ALL wind and percussion instruments. Not \$1,000 for each studio. Less than \$1,000 for the entire wind and percussion division. This is a real shame, as there are some great things going on at that particular school.

While the scholarship stroke is nice, there are a lot of things that the savvy student should consider as they face a difficult decision between many schools who all really want them to matriculate at their school in the fall:

- You have to feel comfortable where you land. This means comfortable with the faculty, comfortable with the students, comfortable with the physical facility of the School of Music and comfortable in the town in which the college is located.
- You have to find a major teacher whose agenda is aligned with your agenda. Hopefully, he or she can provide a track record to illustrate that they have the ability to help you achieve your goals.
- You need to realize that the number one factor in whether or not you will succeed is not the teacher, not the school, not the orchestra that you will get to hear, but is instead your willingness to immerse yourself and work hard.
- Finally, if you find that music may not be your thing (as many do), is the school that you are choosing able to offer a comprehensive slate of alternative options? Seventeen years old is a brutal time to make a decision about what you want to do for the rest of your life... at UGA, the vast majority of students university-wide change their majors at least once.

As I settle comfortably into mid-life, the people with whom I find myself nodding my head in vigorous agreement are the ones that talk about life being all about relationships with people. I couldn't agree more. A successful football team, a successful corporation, a successful School of Music are usually led by people who share in this philosophy. It is why they are able to succeed continuously. People who *get* people know that one of the most important things that we can do is to let someone know that their work is valued and appreciated. It is one of the most basic human needs.

In a week, when March Madness begins, some 15 seed will beat a 2 seed in the first round of the tournament. If you were to ask the coach of the Cinderella school if they had the cream of the crop lined up at their doorstep, chances are that you would get a smirk as a reply. But, they will have succeeded because they built something outstanding with the materials that they had. Hard work and a willingness to learn will trump under-fulfilled potential and talent every day of the week.

I know that anyone who is in the business of recruiting seventeen year olds (or 22 year olds) as a primary function of their job is likely to have their heart broken more than once. But, in the end, our job, like the coach, is to get the absolute best

out of the students that we do have the honor of teaching, by creating an environment that encourages achievement and success.