

# The Complete Musician

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There is a question that I often ask myself, and think about, perhaps you do too. Something that comes to mind as I prepare for a student's next lesson, listen to the performance of a musical master, or marvel at the accomplishments of my MTNA associates and friends. What are the qualities of a Well-rounded Musician?

Frankly, it depends on who you ask. According to a test on a current dating site, a well-rounded musician is someone who can correctly answer 40 of 50 questions regarding song lyrics and band members of every obscure rock group since 1960.

If you were to ask people in the music entertainment industry what makes a complete musician or a complete package - they would tell you that to be successful, you need a specialty, plus a broad range of instrumental skills, in addition to composing and arranging abilities. It is doing and being whatever is necessary to give you an edge over someone else and get the next available gig.

Who is a well - rounded musician? Really?

Someone who straddles the Classical and Popular music world?

Someone who is a highly capable jack of all trades?

Perhaps.

I have a few items that I feel could belong on the well-rounded musician list of qualities, and I would like to share them with you this evening.

## #1 - A complete Musician Returns to the Beginning

The idea of returning to the beginning is much more than simply following the musical direction "da capo al fine". It is part of the innate satisfaction of hearing or playing a familiar melody, like the return of the main theme melody after it's perilous travels through a far flung development section. Likewise, it is returning to one's musical roots, and reliving the childlike wonder and reaction to sound, the beauty of ongoing discovery and surprise. We can appreciate how simple things have expanded beyond our childhood's understanding, and how our musical life can build upon itself, and give us our very identity. As has been said by a notable musician of today, **"We are the sum total of everything we have experienced musically."** Even a return to the beginning of time is possible through the art of sound, because **music is a form of relating oneself to the universe.**

## #2 - A complete musician is a Humanitarian

Like it or not, music is a people oriented business for that is where the resonance of the notes lie, within the human heart. I believe that a successful and complete musician understands this concept, and also realizes that he or she, as the performer, must be the first to connect with the music's message, and then be prepared to share it with others.

As C.P.E. Bach has said, **"A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved. He must of necessity feel all of the affects that he hopes to arouse in his audience....."**

Horace, the Roman poet adds to this idea, "If you wish me to weep, you must mourn first yourself.

Who we are on the inside will directly impact our ability to connect with others, either through performance or in our teaching. We don't teach music, we teach people.

**Shinichi Suzuki** has said, **"The real essence of art turned out to be not something high up and far off - it was right inside my ordinary daily self - If a musician wants to become a finer artist, he must first become a finer person."**

## #3 - A complete musician is a skillful specialist

Regardless of one's instrument of choice, the time that is spent in perfecting necessary skills takes more than a few days and weeks, it takes years of dedicated rehearsal. It is a combination of success, disappointment, frustration, refinement, and hard work.

Perhaps with tongue in cheek, J.S. Bach is to have said, **"It's easy to play any musical instrument: all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time and the instrument will play itself."**

"Like a great chef, we master each basic musical skill and technique until they are totally ours, at any tempo, and then we are free to use them in creative and delicious ways. - It is not enough to practice something until you can play it right, to be a true artist; you need to rehearse something until you cannot play it wrong. Being a complete musician is knowing what to do from beat to beat and note to note, for as Claude Debussy has said, **"Music is the space between the notes"**

#### #4 - A Complete Musician Can See the Forest While climbing the Trees

In my mind, a complete musician understands the reality of priority and balance, whether voicing a polyphonic musical line, or collaborating with others as part of a group. He or she understands that in the best ensemble music, we take turns standing at the front of the sound, or adding to the background of color and energy that sends the melody forward. To understand your role in relation to all the notes swirling about you is seeing the forest while climbing the tree.

A complete musician makes an individual contribution to a group effort in ways that are positive and help achieve goals for the collective good. Likewise, as we serve and lead in our music teacher groups and organizations we need to understand that we are but one member of the orchestra, and that all of us have an important contribution that we can make from wherever we stand.

**In the words of Robert Schumann, "If we were all determined to play the first violin we should never have an ensemble. Therefore, respect every musician in his proper place."**

#### #5 - A Complete Musician is at ease in many areas of the concert hall.

A complete musician can be comfortable in the audience as an informed listener as well as on stage as a dynamic performer. They may work behind the stage, and understand the ideas behind sound projection and good acoustical engineering. They not only appreciate the variety of sound and texture that makes music interesting, but realize that by developing different skills and having new experiences on their part, they have an advantage. They can see and appreciate their craft from many different directions and viewpoints, from above, from below, from behind, from personal experience.

#### #6 - A Complete Musician is a Shaper of Invisible Things

**Leonardo da Vinci once referred to a musician as one who creates invisible art.** While Andrew Marvell, an English poet referred to music as "the mosaic of the air." Invisible things yes, but just as beautiful as the visual arts, and as powerful as unseen gravity. To create works of art in space takes skill, a transference of musical intention to actual sound. To give substance to feelings that cannot be expressed in words, and a place where both the noble and diabolical elements of human existence and drama can reside.

Just as a sculptor sees the shape of his masterpiece inside the uncut marble, the complete musician can anticipate where the musical line will peak, or senses, in detail, which direction a new composition needs to go. It is knowing that the created work is finished, when, as Antoine du Sant Esupary (On TWEN du SANT ex YEW paree) has observed, **"Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."**

#### #7- A Complete Musician Looks Forward and Backward

It has been shown that good sight playing of music is a combination of looking ahead in the score, but also comparing what is coming up to patterns and elements already played, the looking back. To combine two such opposing views creates an accurate picture of the present moment.

Likewise, as we move forward to future innovations of music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to conserve and remember where we have been, our great musical heritage of the past. To play or sing with an understanding of the circumstances behind the music, whatever age and piece of history it may reflect. The notes on the page are but half of the story to tell.

**Yo Yo Ma has said, "An innovation, to grow organically from within, has to be based on an intact tradition."**

**As the great painter, Pablo Picasso has asked, "What do you think an artist is? ..... he is..... a political being, constantly alert to the heartrending, burning, or happy events in the world, molding himself in their likeness." - Pablo Picasso**

**As Abraham Maslow has said, "... A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What one can be, one must be. One's only rival is one's own potentialities. One's only failure is failing to live up to one's own possibilities....."**

Music may not be our whole world, but it makes our world whole. Being a complete musician is a worthy goal for every one of us, and is something that we can and should take a whole lifetime to enjoy and achieve.

- Thank You