

National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy

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TEACHING DEMONSTRATION BY INGRID CLARFIELD

Report by Benjamin Whitten

Ingrid Clarfield, Professor of Piano at Westminster Choir College of Rider University, is an active performer, clinician, and author (From Mystery to Mastery and Artistic Preparation and Performance Series). Her students have won numerous awards at state, national, and international competitions. Featured in this video tape presentation were two students: Laurissa Yee (age 14) playing Mozart's Sonata in C Minor, K. 457 and Theresa Yang (age 15) performing Haydn's Sonata in C-sharp Minor, Hob. XVI/36, The Lark by Glinka (Balakirev) and Scriabin's Étude in E-Flat Minor.

Moderators of the post-demonstration discussion were Jane Magrath, Professor of Piano Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma, and Scott McBride Smith, President of the International Institute for Young Musicians.

Ingrid Clarfield, using two cameras, produces two tapes, one for the student one remaining at her studio. Significant reference is made concerning the degree of study, analysis and feedback that is generated by these lesson tapings. At the outset, Ingrid described the two students. Laurissa, 14 years old, playing the Mozart sonata, is a very outgoing, Florestan-type performer. Theresa, 15 years old, playing the Haydn sonata, is more introspective.

How many teachers would give hundreds of other teachers a peephole into their studio? That's exactly what Ingrid was wondering after she accepted the invitation to loan the conference some of the tapes she made for her students and herself. The point of the tapes? Her students can take the tapes home and absorb the salient points again and again and again. But when she realized 650 fellow professionals would be watching and no doubt evaluating, she announced herself terrified.

No matter, it was a treat to be ringside for her pedagogical expertise and ebullient charm. Here was her now-famous, perhaps, 'beanie-baby' technique for encouraging a student to keep her shoulders down. Put an octopus on one shoulder and a what-WAS-that-thing on

the other and voilà! – no more hunching. Ingrid teases the students affectionately and mischievously. Deciding the character of the Scriabin étude is ‘rage,’ she muses that the student probably never felt that way in her life. “Get into character,” she instructs. She finds ways to get them to project the musical character of the Mozart, Haydn, Balakirev and Scriabin.

Both students appeared focused, motivated, and able to accomplish before ‘our very eyes.’ For their high performance level, the lessons largely became a coaching session. Sharing of interpretive ideas and underscoring the positive projection of these ideas were exciting for the audience.

Throughout the teaching session, the studio ambience radiated an effervescent atmosphere. Ingrid used preparation for a competition as a motivational tool.

Much was accomplished with the student performance in both clips — technical improvements, slurring and melodic extensions, broadening classical concepts relating to style. Ingrid was ever alert, consistently encouraging, complementing, always bubbly and having a romping good time, while highlighting the musical foreground – and background – both representing careful artistic preparation.

Following the viewing of the video tape, the moderators questioned Ingrid about her teaching philosophy. She gave clear explanations concerning her successful pedagogical career. Lively banter enhanced this exchange. Both Dr. Magrath and Dr. Smith were extremely complimentary, impressed by her confident approach and the high degree of her pedagogical attainment.

Breakout discussion sessions were led by Kerry Carlin, Jill Christian, Karen Edwards, Ivan Frazier, Gary Alan Graning, Jody Graves, Joyce Grill, LeAnn House, Leanne Kirkham, Naomi Oliphant, Anita Renfroe, Karen Schlabaugh, Paul Sheftel, Dennis Sweigart, and Benjamin Whitten. Typical of the comments emanating from those discussion groups were:

“The group was impressed by the use of time-lapse video recording, although there was a range of opinion offered concerning recording of lessons...”

“Ingrid showed that it is possible to adapt your teaching style to the learning style of

totally different students.”

“Repetition was used effectively in asking the student to listen critically and work for a desired result. Ingrid was insistent in having the student repeat a passage until improved in the lesson. It was noted that repertoire was selected to complement the students’ personalities and needs.”

“With notably positive responses from all in attendance, the shared analyses of Ingrid’s teaching style revealed an amazing awareness and appreciation for her ability to pace, space, focus the multifarious aspects of the filmed lessons. The quintessential qualities of her pedagogical principles and the exquisite projecting of these ideas to her students was magically and miraculously absorbed by her students and the audience. These film segments were musical events that proved to be awesome to the attending teachers. As voyeurs, we were captivated—a happy time—witnessing an outpouring and an overwhelming resonance to Ingrid’s careful adherence to the conference theme: Extraordinary Results with Every Student Through Exceptional Teaching! What a treat for all of us.”

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