

“THE JOYS OF RESEARCHING”



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Let's say that today is the first day of orchestra. You just received your parts to the Egmont Overture and possibly the Eighth Symphony. You struggle through the sight-reading and afterwards feel remorse that you did not know the piece. You then practiced these two pieces for an hour each day, yet you find that you still get lost during rehearsal. For some reason, counting at the 3/4 Allegro section gets tricky. You feel even worse than before, like there is no hope, and you think about quitting your instrument and applying for a job at McDonald's, where counting rests is not an issue.



How can you avoid this situation? The answer, my friends, is research! Now, what do I mean by research? Nothing intense, like a doctoral thesis, but merely listening to the piece that you are playing. Many of us know from experience how helpful this can be, but many people still neglect this simple and essential tool. By listening to the music counting becomes easier because you learn to feel where your entrances are. Also, your intonation and general tone will improve because you know what your part should sound like. This practice is so simple. For those of you living off campus, just listen to the Eighth Symphony while you're stuck in traffic. If you live in the dorms, play Pictures at an Exhibition while you pick out your clothes in the morning.

Now you may say, "Gee, I'm a poor college student and can't afford to buy so many cds." Hastings has a wide selection of recording priced from \$2.49 (Symphonies 3 and 8 with the Hungarian Philharmonic conducted by Janos Ferencsik) to \$29.99 (Beethoven's 9 Symphonies by Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich and conducted by David Zinman) for Beethoven's symphonies as well as multiple collections that include the Egmont Overture and the Triple Concerto. Some of these collections also come with a decorative tin. If you decide to go this route, feel free to buy a copy of Pictures at an Exhibition (all of the recordings at Hastings were the Ravel Orchestration when I checked). These were very affordable starting at \$2.99. I encourage buying cds, because then you have a physical object that you can transfer onto your computer, while still maintaining the ability to play it in a car.



However, if you don't feel like going shopping, you can always use programs like I-tunes. Also, if you still feel like you can't afford cds, the library has a streaming system that you can access on and off campus. Go to the library's website, click on indexes and databases. Once there, click the link "music" and on this next page click on the "Classical Music Library" on the

left side. If you are off campus you will have to set up a password, but that only takes about two minutes. From here you can look up composers and pieces to your heart's content. This database has 403 pieces of work for Beethoven alone, not to mention around five recordings for each piece. The only problem is that this is streamed music, and you cannot take it off of your computer. You can download the pieces, but sometimes just one movement is \$2.00, while you could just buy a cd at Hastings with much more music for a similar price.

Now, if you would like to go one step further in your performance, I suggest researching the composer. Why did he/she write the piece? What was the inspiration? What was happening in the world's history when this composer was alive? What was going on in the composer's life? You could even look up different pieces of art and poetry that reflect the artistic movements during the life of this composer. The library has an amazing collection of books on composers as well as music history and interpretation. I highly suggest that you check it out! The music section is "ML" and on the second floor. You can also go online. Wikipedia usually has decent information on composers. However, I still suggest books over sometimes biased websites.

I hope that this article has sparked a little excitement in you, and perhaps a little bit of ambition to research your piece. I think that you should all do this for the orchestral pieces, but remember to do this with your solos as well. Some pieces become so much more when you research them for only ten minutes.

Remember, keep listening!