

Playing Musically – A Starting Point

Techniques and concepts that enhance musical performance. These basic practices give us a common vocabulary and help us begin the process of developing interpretation of the notes and rhythms of the pieces we are working on.

There are no hard and fast rules. There will be times when these practices conflict and we will need to decide which to apply. There may be situations when we will NOT follow these practices.

JOB ONE

- **BTPT – Breathe Together Play Together** – Starting a phrase after silence, at the beginning of a piece or an interior entrance, everyone that plays at the same time inhales rhythmically and in unison to insure the most accurate initiation of the sound.
 - **Hard Breath** – For notes between beats and after rests, a quick, “hard breath” (like a gasp) helps put that “afterbeat” entrance on time and together

DIRECTION: *Every note is either going someplace or IS that someplace. We can communicate that sense of direction by applying:*

- **SLFL – Short Looks for Long** – Generally, longer notes receive more emphasis than shorter. When short rhythmic values precede a longer note, lead the listener’s ear to the more important note.

Also: ★**HLFL – High Looks for Low** ★**LLFH – Low Looks for High** “*Float the High, Bring Out the Low*”

KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING:

- **BOMP – Bring Out Moving Parts** – Emphasize parts with changing pitches against sustaining pitches for heightened sense of interest. Sustaining parts, give moving parts space – play a little softer.
- **BOAT – Bring Out Altered Tones** – Notes with accidentals (altered tones) temporarily alter the predominate harmony. Play with extra emphasis, so that the listener can perceive the harmonic change.
- **RAFWML – Rise and Fall With (the) Melodic Line** – Accompaniment players listen to the changes in dynamics and other nuances of the melody and play similar shaping in the accompaniment.
- **PRTL – Play Release Tones Lifted** – We tend to play a short note at the end of phrases or motifs aggressively, with more accent than is musical. This is especially noticeable in a two-note motif, where the first note is a quarter or half and the second is an 8th.
- **CTOBL – Crescendo Ties Over Bar Lines** – Tying notes across bar lines hides the downbeat and disguises the meter. This can sound like a mistake since the listener normally expects something to happen on the downbeat of the bar. A slight crescendo makes this sound *intentional*.

FOUR “LENGTH OF NOTE” AGREEMENTS:

- **STACCATO** equals “light and separated.” This means the note before the staccato note, if not marked staccato, still needs to be shortened slightly so there is space *before* the staccato note. The staccato marking in this case *actually* affects two notes.
- **SRP – Separate Repeated Pitches** –repeated pitches can mask the rhythmic pattern; the amount of separation depends on the style: even in a passage marked *molto legato* rhythmic clarity is important.
- **ENPR – Extend Notes Preceding Rests** – Hold notes followed by rests *at least* full value, and often a little beyond, to avoid feeling choppy. It helps to think of extending the note: the “natural” tendency for many players is to hurry the beginning of the rest.
- **COSNET – Cut Off Short Notes Extending Ties** – A long tie ending on an eighth note (or maybe a quarter at faster tempo) often indicates where sound should end – not at the end of the note but at the beginning.