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HARNESSING THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE APPLIED STUDIO BY PHILLIP O. PAGLIALONGA DAYTONA BEACH, FL

"How do you integrate the use of technology into your teaching?" It is a question often asked during interviews, on student evaluations, on reports, and at our annual reviews. As instructors, we think that using technology is something important enough to ask about frequently. When it comes to the actual application of technology, however, most of us dismiss it as something reserved for large classrooms.

This question is often answered with the statement that a studio webpage or Facebook group is utilized. Instructors may also post syllabi and important schedule information on university provided course websites, and frequently will encourage students to record their practice. Is this really integrating technology into our teaching?

The use of technology in the applied studio is problematic for many reasons. First of all, there are few ready made resources available that truly help our teaching. Those resources that are available are often expensive, leading to limited access for our students. Furthermore, our own tech-savvy students can be quite resistant to using strange new technologies in their practice.

For technology to be used effectively in the applied studio a few criteria must first be met:

1. **Effective:** The use of technology must genuinely help our students' progress. It should make achieving their musical goals easier and their practice more efficient.
2. **Accessible:** Whatever technology we decide to share with our students must be made accessible to them long enough for it to prove useful, or at least inexpensive enough that they may obtain it for continued use beyond their formal studies.
3. **Simple:** While powerful software is nice, it often leads to confusion and unused features. Any technology employed should be easy to understand and not require extensive training on the part of the teacher or student.

On the Computer

Much of the software we might like to employ in the applied studio is costly. Though our students have access to computers and laptops, that equipment is not always in a space conducive to instrumental practice. Most of my students practice in the music building practice rooms and dread carrying anything from their dorm room they do not absolutely need. Though this is not an insurmountable problem, I have found that it does tend to limit how often a student will use the computer to aid their practice.

Tuning Meister¹

It seems the more tools you have at your disposal to address intonation the better. Tuning Meister gives you another way to address pitch. The program is full of different features to help analyze intonation in a way that is most helpful. To use it, first select the most appropriate 'view' setting and then begin to play. The program charts intonation in real time as the notes change.

In my own practice, I find it useful to set the 'view' setting to display a staff system. I then select the appropriate key signature and interval of display (usually leaving the display set to show intervals of two or five cents). Next, I simply hit the space bar and begin to play. The program charts all intonation tendencies in real time. When I first began using Tuning Meister, I was overwhelmed with how much information the program displayed. I later realized not to obsess over the variances in pitch on each individual note, but rather to focus on the overall results.

Tuning Meister allows you to use a wide variety of temperaments and offers several other interesting applications. I especially like that I can simply focus on playing and then look

at the results afterward. When I use an ordinary tuner, I wonder how much I am adjusting subconsciously to keep the pitch stable. A quick experiment going back and forth between my tuner and Tuning Meister confirmed this suspicion instantly.

The largest flaw I see with this program is the lack of support for systems other than Microsoft Windows. It would be nice to also have a Mac version given the prevalence of that operating system in the music industry. However, the solution to this problem is as simple as running a Windows emulator such as Parallels or Boot Camp.

Smart Music²

Finding enough rehearsal time with a pianist has always been an issue. This lack of adequate time leaves students feeling uneasy in their solo performances. Smart Music solves this problem by turning the computer into a virtual accompanist. The remarkable innovation with this software is the program's ability to 'follow' the performer as they change tempo using a microphone. It even allows the user to customize the degree to which the program 'follows' to further help achieve the desired result.

Though it is possible to use Smart Music while only using your computer's built-in speakers, this usually does not work well. I would recommend using a good set of headphones or external speakers.

Smart Music also has other built-in features such as a tuner and a metronome that can be superimposed over the accompaniment as you play. With an annual subscription, users have access to most of the standard repertoire for wind instruments, many available in multiple editions.

I find it interesting that not all instructors who are aware of Smart Music incorporate it in their instruction or suggest it to their students. I often worry about the program's total lack of musicality which can lead students to play in a rather bland way. To counter this, I encourage my students to continue to play in a vocal and expressive manner despite what they hear in the accompaniment.

I have found that Smart Music is most effective for practicing pieces with intricate accompaniments or highly technical passages. I prefer to turn off the 'follow me' feature and play at various tempos (slow to fast) with a metronome. This allows me to better understand the interaction between my part and the accompaniment before I meet with a pianist for the first time. The program also allows the performer to hear the accompaniment with the solo line (or in isolation), which can be useful in ensuring complicated rhythms are absolutely accurate.

On the Smartphone/Tablet

At the forefront of cutting edge technology stands the smartphone and tablet. These ultra-portable devices are almost always at our students' side and more often than not are viewed as a distraction instead of a tool.

While these devices can provide a wide variety of tools useful in applied study, their use also presents a number of challenges. The most frustrating issue is compatibility. While many of our students have a smartphone or tablet, they do not all use the same operating system. Additionally, the available software on each device varies widely. Despite these differences, there are a number of apps that are available on most smart devices, and though simple can be employed with great effectiveness.

In my opinion, the most valuable app on any smart phone is the built-in camera. For years, I had students play in front of a mirror to help correct embouchure issues. Now I find using the camera provides even more effective feedback. When I notice a problem (generally relating to embouchure or hand position), I quickly snap a picture or video to share with the student. This allows me to better explain what I have observed in a concrete way.

Another widely accessible and free app available on almost all smart devices is **Google Translate**ⁱⁱⁱ. Google Translate provides a simple and easy way to translate all of the unknown foreign words on the page. There are other apps available that are particular to music, some of which are quite good; however, the versatility and availability of Google Translate remains unparalleled. I have found a few of the more specific music translation apps helpful simply because of their ease of use. One such app- **Mahler Translations**^{iv}- allows you to browse German words and phrases alphabetically as in a 'contact list' rather than having to type each letter. This can be a fantastic time saver if you are preparing a work by Mahler. Another more general resource - **Wotton Dictionary of Music**^v - contains over 8,000 musical terms in German, Italian, French, English, Latin and Spanish with a similar interface.

When it comes to music specific apps, I encourage all of my students with a smart device to have both a tuner and a metronome app. Because of the battery drain it imposes on a device, it is often not desirable as a replacement for a traditional metronome or tuner. The apps are handy enough, however, to justify a quick download.

I have tried several metronome apps and have found **Metronome+**^{vi} to be my favorite. Its interface is accurate and simple, providing metronome sounds that are loud and clear when played through the built-in speakers. The app also allows you to customize the beat with various accent patterns and subdivisions using a simple drop down menu.

There are a wide variety of tuner apps available on virtually every smart device and I suspect different people will prefer different apps. I have found virtually every serious tuner app on the market to be more accurate than the inexpensive tuners many students purchase. After trying several tuner apps, Valentine Radu's **Tuner** has become my favorite. Like **Metronome+**, Radu's **Tuner** provides a clean interface and accurate readings. It easily picks up both clarinet and bass clarinet, and I believe it would do well with most other instruments. It also provides the ability to display with a transposition and in solfege, as well as to set the overall pitch level to the user's preference (i.e. A=441 etc.).

My most used app without a doubt is **Tempo Slow**^{vii}, which allows the user to record a sample and then change the speed of the playback without altering the pitch level. Before discovering **Tempo Slow**, I used a low-cost tape recorder that was able to play back at half-speed. Now with **Tempo Slow**, I am able to accomplish the exact same task without changing the pitch; this way, I can listen for things other than just technical clarity. In fact, I find **Tempo Slow** to be even more useful for working on legato passages since it permits the user to easily hear every nuance. The program also allows the user to select a track in a music library from their device, Dropbox, or directly from their computer over Wi-Fi. This feature is especially convenient if the user wishes to play along with a recording, but would like to change the tempo to better suit his or her needs. **Tempo Slow** offers several in-app purchases to further enhance the software, including a "BPM Tapper" which allows the user to determine the exact metronome speed of a selection and then alter the tempo by beats per minute.

Conclusions

Technology is most certainly worth integrating into your applied teaching. You must be creative in your thinking in order to take advantage of it; nonetheless, when used correctly it provides tools to help us do our jobs more effectively and with less effort.

Finding new programs and apps that you can use in your applied teaching is not always easy. I have found many of the applications mentioned here by pure accident.

Think about how technology could aid your students, and then search for a program that will meet their individual needs. Who knows, you might stumble upon something that can really benefit your studio!

End Notes

ⁱ Tuning Meister is available at www.TuningMeister.com. A free, fully-functional, 90-day trial is available free of charge.

ⁱⁱ "Smart Music is available at www.smartmusic.com. Smart Music is offered as an annual subscription starting at \$36.00 per year.

ⁱⁱⁱ Google Translate is available for free on most devices, including iOS and Android platforms.

^{iv} Mahler Translations is produced by Tromba Software and available in the iTunes App Store for \$3.99.

^v Wotton Dictionary of Music is produced by Tromba Software and is available in the iTunes App Store for \$0.99.

^{vi} Metronome Plus was developed by Joseph LeBlanc and Dynamic App Design. It is available in the iTunes App Store currently for \$0.99.

^{vii} Tempo Slow is produced by Martian Storm Ltd. and available in the iTunes App Store for free.

About the Author

Phillip O. Paglialonga currently serves as the Assistant Professor of Clarinet at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida where he was recently awarded the Bethune-Cookman University Excellence in University and Community Service award. He did his undergraduate study at DePaul University as a student of Larry Combs and earned a masters and a doctorate from the University of Michigan as a student of Fred Ormand and Daniel Gilbert. He has held positions with the Sarasota Opera Orchestra and Haddonfield Symphony. He has appeared with numerous orchestras including the Sarasota Orchestra, Florida Orchestra, Orlando Philharmonic, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Kalamazoo Symphony, Windsor Symphony in Ontario, and is a member of the Walt Disney World Orchestra. He has also performed at several summer festivals including the National Repertory Orchestra, the Music Academy of the West, and Lake George Opera. He is a founding member of the PEN Trio (www.PENtrio.com) which regularly tours throughout the United States and is represented by Price Rubin & Partners. In the summer months Dr. Paglialonga is on the faculty at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Michigan where he performs with the Festival Orchestra. Dr. Paglialonga has authored several articles for *the Clarinet*, *Keynotes Magazine* and *School Band & Orchestra* which are available on his website (www.thefirstgissilent.com). He is an avid sports fan and enjoys studying art history.

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