

# From “Art for art’s sake” to “Art for the community’s sake” to “Art for Life’s sake”

by Tomomi Ohrui

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## 1) Social Change (paradigm shift)

In this rapidly changing society, how is a music conservatory preparing students for the change? What is a teaching artist and what is the role of teaching artist today?

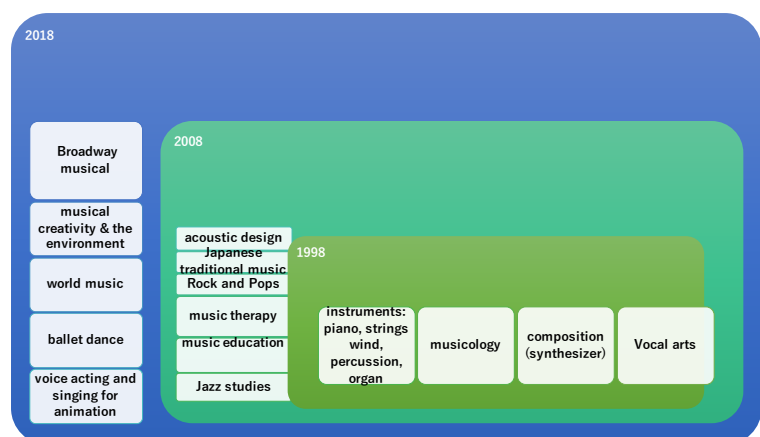
Before we begin to answer these questions, I’d like to address as an example how one Japanese music college; a college where I teach now, has changed so drastically in the past 20 years. Senzoku is one of the major music colleges in the Tokyo area. The number of undergraduate students is close to 2000; about 500 students each grade.

This diagram shows that in the last 20 years, the school has been adding more and more courses. Each green square demarcates 10 year time span (1998,2008, 2018). The small white squares are courses offered.

In 1998, you can see that there were 4 main areas of study. These are typical conservatory-style courses. The focus of the school back

then was mainly to develop students’ performing skills. 10 years later in 2008, 6 new courses were added on top of the courses already offered. And another 10 years later in 2018, 5 more new programs started.

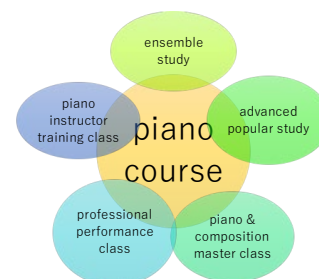
Today, students enroll in conservatories with the hope of getting a job that is in some way related to music, but they are not necessary interested in



becoming a performing artist. Also the students' background in music has become more diverse. Classical music is not the only music students come to study at Senzoku. That's why, the school decided to expand the areas of study to open doors for students with varied interest.

So, the student enrollment has been shifting from the traditional conservatory-style courses to courses that are more vocational, more commercial, more subject-specific and more cross-disciplinary. More than half of the student body at Senzoku are now non-classical music majors.

The 5 circles in the next diagram shows selected areas that a piano major chooses from. What used to be a simple piano course is now divided into more specific fields. Again, this kind of adjustment was needed to invite students coming from diverse background in music training without sacrificing the standard that the college has established.



What's happening to our music schools today? Are we facing new challenges in the right direction? How can we re-think and re-frame our music education? These questions are for us to think about together. And hopefully team up with like-minded peers to move forward in small the steps.

## 2) my story of "change": 30 years after graduation

How did my perception of music change since I was a college student 30 years ago?

I was born in Tokyo and grew up there until my father was transferred because of his business commitments to NY. I enrolled in the Juilliard School as a piano major and was trained in a very orthodox way. After living in the US for 16 years, I moved back to Japan at the age of 30. I started giving concerts in Tokyo with big programs to show off my ability as a young pianist.

My audience was very limited to a group of people who wished me well like my friends, neighbors, my students and colleagues etc. And even among this limited group, I had to carefully select who'd be interested enough to come to a classical concert. I hated this pre-concert ritual every time. Couldn't I just give a concert that people want to come, not because of personal reasons, but because of the program itself? This is the reason I shifted more towards the "outreach" style of performance and away from traditional type of solo recitals.

Just around this time, which was around the year 2000, a new teaching artist curriculum was emerging at my alma mater. The Art Education

program at Juilliard was being developed by Eric Booth and Edward Bilous. If you are interested in knowing about this topic, please refer to Eric's excellent book, "The Music Teaching Artist's Bible."

Eric defines "teaching artist" as, "a practicing professional artist with the complementary skills and sensibilities of an educator, who engages people in learning experiences in, through, and about the arts."

He also explains that the word "art" means "to put things together". And "education" means "to draw out." So, a "teaching artist" is someone who shows how to put things together and draw out new meaning for and with the audience.

When I read this book, I thought this is exactly what I wanted to do and in fact I was doing without knowing the word, "teaching artist". I am glad this terminology has become more common and that the misconception of outreach as transient work to earn extra bucks, is diminishing. I am happy that more and more institutions are providing outreach training so that the students learn while in school, to create tailor-made program for each targeted audience.

### 3) my present work 【school concert】



Finally, let me share with you my recent work as a teaching artist.

You will see some movies of our school concert in our website. ([http://littleclassic.jpn.org/?page\\_id=878](http://littleclassic.jpn.org/?page_id=878)). In the most recent school concert, I visited 4th grade class with 2 excellent musicians who are members of "Little classic in Kawasaki" which is a private organization I started 20 years ago. For this visit, we prepared a program centered around Shakespeare's play, Hamlet. We gather music written for this play by 3 composers: Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich. From their orchestral score, we made a transcription for flute, clarinet and piano. We also prepared our own script and acted it out the play with some help from the school teachers.

We, classical musicians, are trained to perform from the score, but we are not trained to compose or to transcribe music, nor are we trained to act out or to speak in public. But, these are some of important skills of teaching artistry that musicians in 21st century will benefit to have .

3 student volunteers joined us to play the scene that depicts Hamlet's confusion and the gloomy atmosphere. They improvised on the xylophone

using set pitches of an octatonic scale while I play an ostinato pattern on the piano which I extracted from Shostakovich's music.

The school teachers and the children and the us musicians were all very stimulated by this interaction. If it weren't for this improvisation, we wouldn't have been able to play together right there on the spot. So the value of improvisation, can't be measured by its outcome alone, but in the process of the act and in our attitude. For me as a musician, it was exciting to learn Shostakovich's music by playing a different version of it. It inspired me to wanted to learn more of his style so that I can respond better to student's improvisation.



### 【music class in Cambodia】

The next example of my work as teaching artist took place in Siem



Reap, Cambodia this past summer. I had an opportunity to teach in a junior high school for three days. As you know, many areas in Cambodia are still underdeveloped. The children are an important part of the labor force. So not all parents welcome their kids to attend the school. There is no music class aside from sporadic coaching by volunteers. The students can't read music, but they love to sing. They did have some experience playing keyboard

harmonica which were donated by a Japanese NPO. With this information, I literally improvised my class.

As I looked around the school, I found a Cambodian xylophone lying on the floor of the storage room. This instrument is not tuned to equal temperament, which give a beautiful poignant feeling. So I transcribed a Cambodian folk tune played on this unequal tempered the best I can, for a well-tempered keyboard harmonica.



I also made the students compose a tune using just the blacks keys (es, ges, as, b, des: pentatonic scale) on the keyboard and made them play the composed tune in canon.



I was very impressed by their enthusiasm. The music won't provide them with basic needs, but that didn't stop them from learning with eagerness.

#### 4) Conclusion

In conclusion, I'd like to share a quote by Leon Botstein. He says, "There is a crucial need today for the musicians to deliver special meaning otherwise not available to the audience."

What special meaning can we as a musician deliver? Maybe the meaning lies not only in music. Maybe it's in relating music to literature or maybe to something else that is relevant to the audience's lives. Maybe the meaning is in learning itself. Whatever it maybe, it is the role of teaching artist to deliver the audience a special "message" that each artist thinks to be meaningful.

Reflecting over the last 30 years of my life, it has been a transition from "Art for art's sake" to "Art for community's sake" to "Art for Life's sake." At first, music was centered around my own standards and my own values that I thought would made me a better musician. Then, it's become more of a tool to serve the community. In the process, I felt the need to re-learn music in a more creative manner especially by using improvisation as a tool, that gave me more flexibility and freedom as a musician. Experimenting different ways to connect with the society, has given me a stronger sense of meaning to be involved in music. For that reason, art has become for me, life's sake.

