



Daniel Heifetz and a summer institute student

Communications Center

If you're in Staunton, Virginia, this summer and attend a **Heifetz Institute** chamber music concert, you'll immediately notice some unusual details. There won't be a music stand in sight. And although pianists and cellists will be seated, all the other musicians, whether they're students or members of the star-studded faculty, will stand throughout the performance.

The tactic grows out the values that violinist Daniel Heifetz, the program's founder and director, seeks to instill in his students. "The essence of my concept of the musical experience has to do with communication—connecting the music to your emotions and being able to project that to the last person in the balcony," he says. By staying on their feet as they perform, Heifetz maintains, the musicians engage their entire bodies; and by playing from memory, they can connect more directly to the music.

The result, in Heifetz's view, is a more visceral form of music-making than in standard concert practice: one that has a greater impact on the audience.

The unusual concert setup is only the most visible manifestation of his idiosyncratic approach to teaching. During the six-week summer program, the institute's 62 young string players engage a range of activities they're unlikely to encounter in a conservatory. In the mornings, sure enough, they practice and get private lessons and coaching sessions with master musicians. (This summer's faculty includes, among many others, James Buswell, Pamela Frank, Elmar Oliveira, Heidi Castleman, Lynn Harrell and Ralph Kirshbaum.) But the afternoons are given over to "Communication Training," consisting of exercises in five disciplines: public speaking, drama, voice, movement and "Freedom of Expression," in which students are encouraged to share elements of their own lives. Heifetz explains that these sessions are intended to help the students get "deeper into the emotional content of the music, rather than just playing beautifully."

Early in the summer, Heifetz asks the students to communicate "joy and happiness" in a two-octave scale. "They'll play it

fast; they'll bounce their bow; but they'll have no idea of how to do it," he says. By the end of the training, though, "they understand that the magic is in the breath *before* the first note, and that they have to sustain that energy through what comes next. They can play it angry; they can play it sad. It's transformational."

For much of its history—it was founded in 1996—the institute has been a seat-of-the-pants operation. But in 2010, it hired an executive director, Justin Reiter, and a support staff. And after a decade in rented quarters on a prep-school campus in New Hampshire, the summer program has now found a permanent home at Staunton's Mary Baldwin College, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Heifetz wants these measures to help ensure that the institution that bears his name will continue long after his stewardship. The Heifetz Institute may reflect his insights and passions in all its details, but as he says: "It's not about me." ■

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