

### ***Musical Expression***

*Musical expression is similar to telling a story. In both a story and a piece of music, there is an overall message to convey. If there are several people telling the story, each person might play a different character. In several people are playing a piece each instrument or part may express a different character. The message in a story is expressed by organizing words into coherent sentences. In music notes are arranged to form phrases that can be compared to sentences. Each phrase expresses a musical idea but also relates to other phrases. These phrases are joined into larger sections that relate much like a paragraph. Each large section is part of the entire piece but can tell contrasting parts of the overall story.*

*Music is more than playing individual notes, rhythms, and articulations. All of the elements of music must be combined to express or say something with heartfelt inflections. If not, it can be as boring as listening to a story told in a monotone voice!*

Here are some important questions to ask yourself concerning musical expression, adapted from Elaine Douvas and Frances Clark's *Tests of Interpretation*.

1. Overall, what is the character of this piece? What do I want to express?
2. Where is the highpoint of the entire piece?
3. Do I sufficiently prepare for it and give it the suspense and effect that it requires?
4. Where is the highpoint of each phrase?
5. If I can't feel the highpoint of the phrase, do I sing suitable words to it in an effort to capture its message?
  
6. Does everything that I do sound authoritative?
7. Do I begin each phrase clearly, cleanly, and expressively?
8. Do I let each phrase end sufficiently before beginning another?
  
9. Is the long rhythmic pulse of the piece set at the beginning and held steadily throughout?
10. Do I avoid making overly exaggerated ritards?
11. Do I revitalize the tempo immediately after a ritard?
12. If playing the accompaniment, does it give true, basic vitality to the composition?
13. Do I give full value to all the final beats in the measure or do I hurry into the next measure, thereby impairing the pulse?
  
14. Is there a tremendous difference between my fortissimos and pianissimos with infinite gradations between the extremes?
15. Do my crescendos start softly enough and my accelerandos deliberately enough?
16. Do all of my notes have a singing quality? Especially in the upper notes?
17. Do I give repeated notes and sequences careful treatment?
18. Is there something of interest going on at all times? If I stop playing the melody, do I make something of the accompaniment?