

## **DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC**

Professor Charlotte Mabrey, Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of North Florida (UNF) --and principal percussionist for the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra --conducts the UNF Percussion Ensemble, teaches applied percussion lessons, percussion techniques, and the “Live Music in Jacksonville” lecture class. In particular she teaches the snare drum, the techniques required to play it in a concert setting, and sight reading on this instrument. She reveals in a written communication that her “biggest challenge” in teaching “is trying to make music on the snare as it sounds like a machine gun in the wrong hands.” As a result, she discusses phrases and lines pertaining to this instrument. She does the same on the marimba, timpani, all small instruments.

Professor Mabrey teaches individual students privately in her office in the Fine Arts Center. It is clear from observing her work with students that each and every day of practice, practice, practice has the potential to transform not only the student, as Professor Mabrey suggests, but also the teacher. This music professor indicates that teaching, learning, and/or playing music with others involves a “dynamic exchange” between individuals which has great potential for growth for those involved.

When Professor Mabrey teaches, she encourages, uplifts, and -- in her own words -- helps the students “to take short cuts” in learning how to play a musical instrument well. She asserts that her role is largely that of making practicing and playing easier by helping the students to have strategy in manipulating their instruments for the desired sound and effect. She asks the rhetorical question, “Why let them reinvent the wheel?”

Professor Mabrey enhances and heightens student learning by continually making analogies all throughout her private lessons. For example, when she tutors a student in the appropriate method by which to maneuver drumsticks while playing a percussion instrument, she parallels the idea of “walking, then running, then trotting.” In another example of how to hold and manipulate the drumstick a different way, she asserts, “It is like safe cracking.” In regard to another method, she states, “It is just like lifting weights.”

It is obvious that Professor Mabrey typically has wonderful rapport with her students. She has a very serious although playful relationship with them as is evidenced by her propensity to call her students by endearing terms such as “Sweet Pea” and “Doll.” Each of the students clearly feels relaxed, comfortable and even joyful in her company. It is not uncommon for students to tell her jokes and to be completely open and honest with their professor. They respect Professor Mabrey, who is tuned in to every nuance of each student’s playing and being, and who can be heard repeatedly making positive proclamations while guiding each student. Some examples of this music professor’s assertions while mentoring follow: “I have great confidence in you”; “You can do it”; “That is one of the Grand Canyon steps that you have to take. It will make it so much easier”; “Bravo!” If a student apologizes for making a mistake while practicing, one can hear Charlotte responding with, “No, no, no.”

As stated above, Professor Charlotte Mabrey declares that the students are not the only ones transformed through the desire to make good music and through the “commitment, passion, and integrity” that is necessary to do so. This professor indicates

that she continually grows by having the opportunity to make music with the UNF students. She claims by teaching them she learns more about herself each day and doing so enables her to become more “tolerant, insightful, and empathetic.” That is, Professor Mabrey feels that she has the opportunity to grow more as a human being in general as well as a teacher by mentoring her students on a one to one basis.

Professor Mabrey indicates in a written communication, however, that she does make an effort to teach “dedication...hard work, respect, goal setting, follow through” of one’s work. She also shares her observation that “the instruments are a vehicle for becoming,” and that her “best players” are her “best people.” She maintains that it is in “the trying that they develop, and that “the struggle to attain really prepares them for all other stuff as well.” Professor Mabrey teaches her students to be their highest selves, to be all they can be through the discipline and love required to perfect the playing of the musical instruments she plays and teaches. Is there a transformational learning opportunity anywhere which can exceed this one?

#### Works Cited

Mabrey, Charlotte. Personal interview. 22 Sept. 2006.

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