

LEVELS OF GAZE STAGE FRIGHT

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LEVELS OF GAZE

There is a difficulty in performance, particularly in music, with where to actually look when you're performing. So the three levels-- and these are not exact by any means, but they certainly can be felt one way or the other. But the median point for me is the horizon line, which is that imaginary line. It's not way up here. It's way down here. It's just kind of out there level, the horizon. And that's a really good line to have as your point.

From there, you can get up to about 45 degrees looking out into the distance and still be safe, and I'll explain that to you in a minute. So out there, or at the horizon line, or just below the horizon line, not too much farther than this and too much farther than about 40, 45 degrees down, and you can still be out here and still be reaching outward. But what happens when you drop your head below that, which a lot of people do as they play?

You can kind of feel for yourself that the thought process ceases from going outward, and it begins to just circle itself in a little cone of privacy. And if you come back up to that 45 below and then to the horizon line, you can feel your energy having a freeway out from you. But then if you go up to 45 and then you go way up, which a lot of people do, they look at the ceiling, you can feel kind of the same thing happen. You disconnect from up here (Bud touches Torso) and it becomes a little circle of privacy.

So you want to think about the fact that what you're looking for and the thinking process of seeing images or capturing thoughts, that they're in this area, in these level-- I call them **Levels of Gaze, a little above, at the horizon line, and a little below**. Too much beyond that, and you lose things.

And what happens with people with instruments - this is particularly true with string instruments - is that they'll look at the instruments. They'll spend a lot of time here with the instrument and they can't quite get their heads out and away to get out there. And I think the same is true with those in brass. You find the same tendency to curtail the sense of coming out. So you really want to establish for people that it's all right, whatever they're doing, as long as they're sending it out somewhere in that cone, which has the possibility of arrival.

So that's something to kind of train your own self about. It doesn't mean there's no absolutes. It doesn't mean that you can't go inside and down to find something and come right back up with it. Absolutely, you can do that. It doesn't mean that you can't do this (Bud looks up) and find something in the sky above your head, as long as you bring it here pretty quickly. It's only when you get

caught up here (Bud signals to above the 45 degree level of the horizon) that communication breaks down.

When we think, we go all kinds of places. Thinking's a very active thing. It's why we go out to the woods and to the ocean to think, because we have vista. And so we think. We find things out there. And then if we're talking to somebody, then we come back to them to have that conversation. So you want to watch for yourself in performance, as musicians, that you don't get caught in these two areas and lose this because it's in here that you're really making contacts.

You can make contact with yourself, and you can grab ahold of something that's someplace else, but you have to come back to here. And those Levels of Gaze are very crucial because a lot of people get trapped coming down and staying down here. It's also the closing-eyes business, which is another issue.

You see a lot of this when they play, they close their eyes. And again, there's nothing wrong with closing your eyes, just as you did in the Sculpting exercise, that find the object because it's sometimes easier with your eyes closed, but then to open it and to give it. **If your eyes stayed closed, then it becomes a very private moment, and we kind of feel like we're looking through a keyhole at something we shouldn't be watching because it's so private, what you're doing with your eyes closed, all rapt with your instrument.**

And that's not a big change, but for you, in terms of comfort, for your students, in terms of comfort, it is monumental because **years of playing create corridors of habit.** And they're very hard to get out of. They're very difficult. And you feel very vulnerable when you do something beyond what you've been comfortable doing and just keeping your eyes closed and playing, or keeping your gaze down and away from them.

I think that's one of the reasons that the music stand is such a safety valve for people, because they can look here at the music stand, or here at the music stand. And even though they're only a couple degrees away from where you want them to be, they're out of the realm. They're right in here where it's a safety place. But they don't even have to acknowledge the fact that they're out there. And that's where the danger comes in.

So one of the first things to establish in terms of getting a relationship between the players and the audience is to get them not to be afraid to have this (Bud refers to the Cone of Gaze). You don't have to look directly at the audience. You don't have to make direct eye contact with somebody in the audience. That's not necessary. You just have to acknowledge them by including them in the world of your thought. It's just the world you're creating. They're part of the world you're creating, and you include them in that.

Again, it was easier for me as a mime because you don't have anything with which to communicate other than action. And so you always have to be out there.

You always have to be constantly aware out there of what they're seeing and what they're feeling and what they're doing. Not true in our other forms of performing art.

And we are so prone to making judgments and to making decisions based on these subliminal messages we get from each other. You know that from popular culture in terms of Body Language, what that all means. My God, we're into that with politics now, body language. But a lot of it, there's truth in it, too, because we do give signals subconsciously we don't mean to give that let somebody know that we're not interested. That we're focused someplace else.

So I don't know what you do about this as a conductor. Do you try to memorize the score? But again, you can't do that with everything you're doing. So you have to find ways, even when you need the score, of working with the score but never leaving them.

And there's nothing wrong with going down, picking up the phrase of the note of the entrance, as long as it's obvious that you're just gone for an instant and you'll be back. It's when you leave and we're not sure that you're ever coming back, that's how, when it gets dangerous, I think. The conductor's here, and they go down here (Bud's gaze goes to the score) and you're like, "Are you ever looking up again?" So you look up again, and they go, "I'm here. No, I'm not." (Bud continues as Conductor, looking up but then quickly back down at the score). (laughter). I'm here. No, I'm not."

So if the majority of your focus is to the ensemble, then I think you're on the right track, even though that requires you breaking some habits. I admonished one of the violin players with the orchestra in Norway because they were looking at their violin. And he kind of got piqued at me, and he said, "Okay." He said, "You know, you got me to open my eyes. You got me not to have music in front of me." He said, "And now you want me to look out into the distance." He said, "I'm doing the best I can. I'm at the end of the violin now. I'm out here, down here, at the left hand. I'm not here anymore. I'm not here (gestures to his violin). And soon, I'll get out there. But just give me a minute. Give me some time."

It's breaking down this habit after habit after habit after habit and watching him do it. He said it with such good humor. It was really funny. And eventually, he did. What an astonishing accomplishment that is.

In the sheets that I'm going to give you tomorrow, the little book of stuff, the pamphlet of stuff, there's a couple web pages. And one of the web pages is the Schoenberg done in Norway. And one of the web pages is Metamorphosen by Strauss. So you can see what it looks like, the performance, so that you know it. You can see what they did.

Okay ... so those were the days ...

STAGE FRIGHT

In life as an artist, you actually-- it's interesting. You're safer when you allow yourself to be in your work in your concerts, in your performances than you are in life. And the reason is because, when you bring yourself to your work in a performance, the audience immediately plugs in **their own life** into what you're giving them. So they're not really looking at you. They're really imagining themselves. So you're safer in a way because nobody's really examining you. They're really examining themselves.

If you're not doing it, then they tend to look at you with some critical eye. But if you're really delivering what they need, they're not at all looking at that. They're not realizing what emotional upheaval you're going through as an artist. They shouldn't. They should be thinking about themselves. And it all depends on how you turn that for yourself when you're working.

If your Responsibility is really them, then that gets very clear.