

# The Listening Project

## Thoughts from the Maestros ...

How do *you* listen?! **The Listening Project** is a theme running through the Orchestra's 2019 season, focusing on the key importance of listening for orchestral musicians, but also in society generally.

A great orchestral player has to be a great listener. So how do orchestral musicians learn to listen well? How do they 'tune in' and not simply 'tune up'? What should happen in rehearsals and on stage to increase and develop listening skills? Attention, focus, technique, communication, hunger, empathy, concentration, multi-tasking - what part do these attributes play in the process?

To help answer these questions we began by talking to some of our most important conductors and artists. Here is a 'slice' of what the Maestros have to say...

### Vasily Petrenko, EUYO Chief Conductor since 2015



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**"Listening ability is vital"** for EUYO Chief Conductor **Vasily Petrenko**. His view is that you should realize that while you are performing in the orchestra, while you are playing, and also during pauses. What is important in a musician's listening is the team aspect of it: realizing what is the role of the others is crucial for the quality of the performance.

"Imagine you are playing chamber music," says Petrenko. "You always listen to your partners, and that is easy, as you are close together. But in an orchestra, it is sometimes difficult to hear what are they playing just a few meters from you". This is especially true in compositions that often drift to *fortissimo*, or for players who are at the end of their section with some louder in-

strument nearby.

Therefore, how can you, as a musician, develop your listening skills in a noisy environment? "In my experience" says the EUYO Chief Conductor "you should try to clarify just one single voice from the *tutti*, and tune to that single one. It helps a lot as an exercise in cutting out the noise".

Training one's skill in selective listening might not seem easy, especially if a player has to exercise it in a moment in which his attention is on playing. However, listening is the key to a better playing: and your ability with selective listening will enable you to be a better player.

Once you feel confident enough in your listening skills, it is a good time to let your emotions do the rest. "Spontaneity is welcomed," says Vasily "but one should know beforehand when he or she could afford it in a concert or even in a rehearsal".

How can you know therefore when is the right time to let your emotions loose? When can you allow that 'something' you have deep in you to take control of your music? The Maestro's answer: "you have to know and feel the others' emotions". And on this point, you also have a powerful tool that will help you to know this: your honed listening skill. *"Listening to each other is vital ... to know where are we moving, where are we going emotionally and physically"*.

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*"The ability to direct your listening overcoming the noise of the surrounding instruments is a crucial skill: selective hearing will enable you to cooperate with all the orchestra"*

Vasily Petrenko

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## Manfred Honeck, EUYO Conductor in 2018

To understand better how to work with this dynamic form of listening, Austrian conductor **Manfred Honeck** has a clear idea: "first and foremost, **we, as musicians, must be servants to the music**".

The attitude of humility in front of what is going to be played, and the willingness to step back from the lights of the stage also help in identifying one's function in the musical process. Things are different if you are a section leader, a principal, a second voice or if you have an accompanying role. Furthermore, you have to pay attention to tone, colour, rhythm and balance.

Manfred Honeck tells us that a good player should exercise listening also in non-musical fields, such as 'hanging out' with other people. After all, when we are with others we speak and listen, as much as people in an orchestra play and listen. Consequently, you can train your selective listening by realizing that a monologue is a solo, a dialogue a duetto, a "trialogue" a terzetto, and many people speaking at once are like polyphony in the orchestra.

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*"It is possible to train in this type of dynamic listening even in daily life"*

Manfred Honeck

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While a monologue is the simplest thing you can do, when we speak with someone, we have to listen to our partner, understand when we can intervene, react to his words and so on.

We add layers of complexity, and many voices in a group conversation will make it harder to listen. Transposing the metaphor back to music, Honeck tells us, "*a good musician will know when to lead and when to follow, and what kind of function to have in every moment*".



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## Iván Fischer, EUYO conductor in 1998



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**How to listen in an orchestra?** Composer and conductor **Iván Fischer** has a highly creative but brilliantly effective three-step process which starts like this: "*the trick is in to listen far away*". This means that players should be encouraged to play while listening some other instrumental section instead of their own. His words are clear: "if you are a violinist, don't listen to other violins: hear the piccolo, or the tuba; if you are a trombone player, don't listen to the brass: listen to the cellos, or the violas".

The second step suggested by Iván Fischer is that once you train yourself in listening to other instruments, you should start listening to the whole orchestra: the whole of it, not just a part of it, or a section, as if you were a mere specta-

tor of the whole.

When you have mastered the art of listening to a whole orchestra, Fischer adds a third step that, as a musician, you have to do: "**make sure you hear yourself**". In his words: "you have to hear your inner voice: you have to play from your soul, from your hearth ... when you hear the whole orchestra and yourself, then the balance will naturally emerge".

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*"Hear the whole Orchestra, and you will find out how much you need to give to contribute to the whole"*

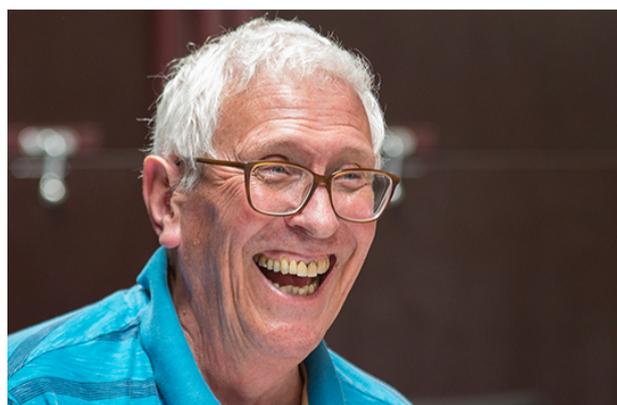
Iván Fischer

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## Peter Gane, EUYO Lower Brass tutor and audition co-ordinator since 1986

EUYO tutor and long-time mentor **Peter Gane** comes to help with his experience by telling us **how to hone your listening skills as a EUYO player**. For most professional orchestras is relatively easy to play in tune and hear with ease and clarity. Why is that? Of course, the members of a good regular professional orchestra know each other's capabilities and the music very well, and do not have any pressure from the technical or physical concerns of playing.

There is a further point, however, which is also important: in-depth knowledge of the repertoire. Knowing that you can play your part well and knowing how your part fits in the orchestra is the liberating factor for your



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skill to grow. Being free from concerns like “am I playing this part correctly?” or “how can I avoid making mistakes?” is a liberation for ears and eyes, which are then available to do something else.

Self-awareness and trust in your musical skill will enable you to have free eyes to look at your section and the others, and free ears for listening to others besides yourself, and consequently developing your listening skills.

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*“My tip for young orchestral instrumentalists is to take time to get to know your part thoroughly, both in and out of your context. Listen to different recordings and interpretations, conquer any of the technical challenges thrown up and be intimate on how your part fits into the whole picture”*

Peter Gane

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Listening is “***the essential orchestral radar***” that helps communication and contributes toward the making of music at a much deeper level.

Practising a lot is the way to improve: already in the first rehearsal, you should be able to be creative, flexible and responsive, with an active and engaged posture and body language. You should be able to breathe well, keep a relaxed balance, and alert focus, and be positive.

“*Be confident,*” suggests Peter Gane, “*maybe even listen with your eyes and see with your ears. Develop your peripheral vision, get your eyes out of the printed page, smile and enjoy making music*”.

*your peripheral vision, get your eyes out of the printed page, smile and enjoy making music”.*

Let’s close this brief view from the Maestros with **Vasily Petrenko’s** advice: “*play as best as you can, listen to the others and be confident: then they will listen to you*”.

Have you got any ideas about how to listen?! Let us know through a video, an e mail, and we’ll add your thoughts to our listening archive. To find out more about the project, and how to share with us your thoughts: <http://www.euyo.eu/projects/ongoing-projects/the-listening-project/>

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