

Personal Reflection – February 20, 2023

Who Makes the Music?

Yesterday, I had the great joy of watching and hearing Verdi's *Ballo In Macherà*, the 1991 performance with Luciano Pavarotti and Aprile Mille in the main roles and Jimmy Levine conducting the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra at the Met! Amazing! I watched Jimmy Levine dance at the podium, his every movement consistent with the music written by Verdi. And, *the dance was pure James Levine*.

I learned recently that the conductor of the orchestra is actually the *conductor of the opera*. Every decision is under his or her baton. I wondered what Verdi would say about Jimmy Levine's decisions. I trust he would recognize that this performance was not his opera, but Jimmy's. Fidelity to the script does not create such music and acting as I heard and saw: it is what the orchestra, singers, set designer, costume designers, and the lighting managers – all led by the conductor – *do* with the written script.

Each production of *Ballo* is new and different; each is reading the same script written by Verdi.

I see this as a powerful metaphor of the kind of creativity and fidelity needed when I design and teach using *dialogue*. There is a script: the principles and practices, the processes. What I do with that script with this particular group of learners, has to be unique. Even more: my unique experience *changes* the script (even if only slightly), amends it to fit these learners in this particular context. It is still *Ballo* and it is MORE.

Perhaps the most creative rendition is the most faithful one – so deeply respecting these learners and their unique context as to change the rhythm or the sequence or the tempo, to create a new experience of Dialogue Education. As a new opera team, under the baton of a new conductor, will create a new *Ballo* someday soon.

What is poetry? The aspiring poet can say he is the first poet and eschew all past poetry. That's not poetry, it is foolishness. Or he can so esteem an ancient poet that he copies his idol's work. That's not poetry, it is repetition. Or he can use all of the past and do something different with it – that is poetry. (T.S. Eliot)

The purpose of history is change.

--Jane Vella