

Music Unveiled: Duncan Lorien and His Understanding Music Seminars

By Guy Spiro

Regular readers will know that I rarely endorse. I rarely even write about individual teachers or systems of teaching. But every once in a while I do make an exception for someone or something that I find to be exceptional themselves. Duncan Lorien and his Understanding Music Seminar is one of those.

When I met Vivian Leibhart, Duncan's Chicago area representative, at a Body Mind and Spirit Expo last winter, I was impressed with her enthusiasm but skeptical of her claims. A good salesperson can whip up enthusiasm for whatever they're selling, but Vivian had that glow of the true believer about her so I listened more closely. Now, of course, just being a true believer does not mean that the thing believed in is necessarily the real deal. We've all experienced the recently converted to any number of systems and they usually are not even close to ready to take it with that grain of salt you hear about. Hard to believe was the seemingly outrageous claim that she made. At the end of a weekend seminar, everyone in the class will sit before a keyboard, in front of everyone else, and read and play a short bit of music? Bach, for crying out loud? That old saying, if it sounds too good to be true, it almost certainly is, comes immediately to mind. But I tell you, I and all of the others in the class did just that. Slowly, hesitantly, but we all did it.

If this is of any interest to anyone reading this, then the first thing I'd recommend is to read the interview I did with Duncan back in the March, 2008, issue. You can find it online at this address: http://www.lightworks.com/MonthlyAspectarian/2008/March/conversation_Duncan_Lorien.html

That interview will give you some idea of Duncan's style of teaching and communicating which I found interesting for many reasons, not the least of which is he reminds me of myself. It became clear to me in that first conversation that he teaches music

much the same way I teach astrology, step by step, fundamentals and practice, one layer on another, in the correct sequence. This takes something that seems to many people to be overwhelmingly complicated from the realm of the incomprehensible to the easily grasped. When things are taught properly they make sense and fall into place.

One of the things that becomes clear in the Friday night segment of the weekend is just how buggered up music and music education is. You will find shocking how few professional musicians can actually read and play music. It is the rare individual who can wade through the music education process, and it's no wonder they defend it so ardently. They worked very hard indeed to earn those degrees. One of the biggest problems is that mistakes made hundreds of years ago were never corrected, and fix after fix has exacerbated and further complicated them. Right from the very beginning in music education you run into the problem of middle C. Now, most everyone in the world thinks that middle C is in the middle of the keyboard. I did. I was as surprised, as you might be now, to find that it is not. So when young children sit down at the keyboard with their first piano teacher, they are told to believe something that they can see is not so. It only gets worse from there.

Did you know that the musical scales from the various cultures are based in their religions? I didn't, but of course that makes sense. The Asian five note scale is based on the five elements. The twenty-one note Indian scale is based on deities. When you hear how music in the west was "informed" by the Church and how the limitations put in place created errors that were compounded over and over again, you begin to see why music seems so complicated. It is complicated, and way more complicated than it needs to or should be. Thankfully, Duncan has created a system that cuts through all that

obfuscation and really does have people understanding music and beginning to play it at the end of a weekend seminar.

For all of the clearing up confusion and teaching it in the right way that Duncan has accomplished, there is one thing he cannot do for the student, and that is to do the practicing that is necessary. But even here he has made things surprisingly easy. Ten minutes a day is all that he asks of you. In those ten minutes you work on reading music, playing notes, scales, and chords. Even the fingering exercises that you need to do to be able to hit the keys that you want to when you want to, are all there. Anyone can commit to ten minutes a day, right? I confess that I only lasted about three weeks of my daily practice. I missed one day and did twenty minutes the next day and well, you can guess how that turned out. But the problem was mine and not Duncan's system. I am firmly convinced that had I kept up the practice schedule, I would now be reading and playing like a pro. I will be taking the seminar again, and probably again.

The Understanding Music Seminar is not an inexpensive weekend, but I believe it is worth every nickel of it. As Duncan teaches you about music, he pulls in examples and information from many areas of the world and of life. You get a great deal more than the music, and the music by itself would be enough. The really good news is that you can retake it whenever you have the chance, in any city in the world where Duncan is teaching it, for a huge discount for the first time rate. I highly recommend this seminar, for the serious student of music, for the frustrated student from childhood, all the way to the mildly curious. Even if you don't continue with the practice in the weeks and months following your weekend with Duncan, you will come away changed for the better, knowing more about the world, and more than you would have thought possible, understanding music.