

## Student's Revenge

New combat ideas for students. Teachers beware!

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### Lesson Scenario

Teacher: Jenny, your assignments for next lesson are: Have the Handel memorized. Oh, and make a recording of it too. On the Bach, work the marked sections- especially measures 15-17. Do those two measures 500 times this week.

Jenny: Takes a deep breath and says, OK. (She's thinking: How am I going to do this? And what did I do wrong to get on \_\_\_\_\_ (teacher's name) bad student list?)

Teacher: See you at your next lesson.

I think all students at some time in their harp lesson life have received a similar assignment. I know I have. As soon as you get home from the lesson, you have a choice to make: what are you going to do about this "death sentence" assignment? There are two options; I think the following poem and proverb explain them very well.

The following poem is a taste of what is called Cowboy Poetry. This is a very well know poem, and one of my favorites.

### The Rooster's Revenge Anonymous

Once upon an Easter morning little Miss Virginia Meggs  
Found a score of very pretty, somewhat gaudy, Easter eggs;  
Some were pink and some were yellow, some were brown and others blue,  
One was striped the color purple, some were dyed a crimson hue.

In the nest out in the barnyard, where the rooster stretched his legs,  
Little Miss Virginia placed these pretty Easter eggs;  
Came the rooster, crowing loudly, strutting as a rooster should,  
Joy in anticipation, pride in his coming fatherhood.

By the nest he drew up proudly, his handwork to view,  
For he knew his mate was setting, knew the hatching date was due.  
Sad the day and sad the moment, sad his terrible surprise,  
Joy fled from his heart in horror at the sight before his eyes.

In the home nest of his lady, whom he would have sworn was true;  
There were eggs of pink and yellow, brown & green, and red & blue.  
With the boldness of an eagle next door did the rooster fly;  
Battle ruffled were his feathers, blood was in the rooster's eye.

His mind was firm, determined, his jaw was set and grim  
And the next door neighbor's peacock got the tar beat out of him.

## An Old Proverb

If your enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.  
For you shall heap coals of fire upon his head, and you will be rewarded.

Let's say you choose to be the rooster and devise a way to get even and in a sense beat the tar out of your teacher. I can guarantee no matter what type of action you take; something as simple as not practicing, to some devious way to get back at your teacher, will backfire. Mom's and teachers have a great way of changing those plans lickity-split. A bad battle wound might be finding a new teacher if you get your revenge.

What about "heaping coals of fire"? Seems like a good idea. Let me explain.... The phrase "heap coals of fire upon his head" is in reference to a neighborly tradition when people heated, and cooked with fire. If your fire went out, it was common practice to restart your fire by borrowing some coals from your neighbor and to bring them home on your head. It's easy to be kind, and go out of our way for our friends, but it is much harder to do these actions to our enemies.

Since the Rooster's Revenge attempt has a high failure rate, let's look at a couple of combat ideas on how to "heap coal".

### MEMORIZING STRATEGIES

- Find at least one recording of the piece you're playing. If you can't find it on a harpists' CD's, then try to find one of another instrument. Listen to the CD until you can sing the melody for memory. The more times you hear the piece, the easier memorizing will be. Burning a CD of just the song you're working on, and making multiple tracks of it lets you hear the piece more than once.
- Make yourself work on only one section until it's mastered. Doing multiple repetitions of a section is the way to get muscle memory. My mom came up with a new version of baseball when I was little, and I still use it as a tool today. Set a number of perfect repetitions to accomplish. If you completed a repetition correct, you have one tally one the home run score board. If that repetition had a mistake in it, you just received your first strike. Three strikes (bad repetitions) and you lose all your home runs. Start over, but this time you have to play it slower hands together, or play hands separate and double the amount of repetitions to do. After achieving your goal, close the music and see if you have that section memorized.

- Don't bite off more than you can chew. Keep the memorizing sections small. After completing one section, play the whole piece or play a different song. Give your brain a break before tackling the next section.
- Test your memory at the end of a practice session to see how well you memorized those new sections.
- Add old memorized sections to the new to complete the song.
- Mark and memorize recover points in the piece. This tool has saved me several times when I was performing or competing and had a memory slip. An easy way to practice "messing up" during a practice session is to have a family member in the house yell out "STOP" or "JUMP" whenever they want. You've just made some type of mistake, and have to instantly jump to the next recover spot.

#### PRACTICING TACTICS

- Make daily goals for each song on how much you want to accomplish.
- Look for the hardest part of the song and start working repetitions.
- If you have a tendency to start at the beginning of a piece and play through a tough spot making mistakes and then restart the piece, try working backwards. Start at the end and work 2-4 measure sections until you reach the beginning of the piece.
- Put a sticky tab at each working point to keep track of repetitions. Not only will this show your teacher that you did work on it, you can easily see which spots you've covered and which ones need tackling. It will also give you a sense of pride when you see how much work you've done.
- Practice with the metronome. I know this isn't always fun, but the benefits are worth every "tick".
- The fastest way to learn a piece is to play it SLOW!
- Listen to a recording of the piece while watching the music noting that dynamics and phrasing.
- Study the tough measure. Look for patterns. Find out exactly which notes are melody and harmony. When a chord progression is hard to memorize, I have found that playing each "voice" (soprano/melody, alto, tenor, and bass) separate helps me hear the progression for that voice. Next I play the soprano and bass together. After that I play the inner notes together. I keep coming up with different combinations until I have to put it all back together. After that drill, the measure is usually memorized.

Hopefully these strategies and tactics gave you some new arsenals for "heaping coals" and finishing your assignment. About that 500 repetitions... go the extra mile... do a thousand! Make sure you keep a record so you can prove it to your teacher! (Hint: Practicing schemes that go the extra mile really dump the coals on.)