

INTRODUCTION

Karen Tuttle is unquestionably a living legacy in the world of viola pedagogy. The potency of her teaching philosophy, along with her dynamic personality, has influenced music students for almost sixty years. She has always been a famously free spirit whose ideas have consistently drawn both controversy and allegiance. Despite changes in cultural climate, Tuttle's belief in the importance of personal exploration has remained steadfast.

In the field of instrumental pedagogy, it can be difficult to attribute knowledge to its original source. Students have years of private instruction, play in countless ensembles and orchestras for conductors, and hear performances and recordings of all kinds. Through these experiences, many aspects of playing are anonymously accrued into one's general account of musical understanding. There will be comparatively few ideas that one can say with certainty came from somebody else. Those that are recalled in this way are probably very important, principles that transcend any specific piece or passage; these principles were very likely to have been passed down from teacher to teacher. Milan Kundera has written similarly on human gestures:

If our planet has seen some eighty billion people, it is difficult to suppose that every individual has had his or her own repertory of gestures. Arithmetically, it is simply impossible... A gesture cannot be regarded as the expression of an individual, as his creation (because no individual is capable of creating a fully original gesture, belonging to no one else)...¹

¹ Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 7.

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While our individual gestures, ideas, or chromosomes are certainly not unique, it is the combination of them that distinguishes each of us. In much the same way, Karen Tuttle's philosophy contains ideas that have been taught or conceived before; the concepts themselves are not original. There were many accomplished viola players and teachers before her time, and there will be others to come. She freely acknowledges those she considers formative to her method.

Karen Tuttle has created a unique combination of ideas, applied them to her own life, and has taught them through her own personality and conviction. Her contributions to both the meaning of performance and the mechanics of viola playing have enriched the field of viola pedagogy on a scale that is rare. More than a playing technique or a school, Tuttle's teaching is truly a philosophy. Her commitment over the course of years, as well as the quality of her students, have made her teaching principles part of the string world's collective unconscious. The nature of her playing philosophy, and the level of exposure it has received, has also made her teaching both controversial and misunderstood. The purpose of this study is to examine Karen Tuttle's influence on modern viola teaching.

As a teacher, Tuttle's most immediate attribute is a sympathetic personality. As many former students recollect, Tuttle is remarkably able to convey her trust and faith in each person. Perhaps the most distinctive 'stamp' of Tuttle's teaching is that her former students play so differently from one another. While it is a teaching method, the principles allow for a wide range of outcomes. This is evident in the different kinds of people that have studied with her, and the variety of playing careers in which they find themselves.

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Tuttle's care for the individual is coupled with a unique vitality. She exudes joy for teaching, which is fueled by the passion of her beliefs. The core of her teaching principles can make some people uncomfortable: Tuttle accepts sexuality as the most basic element of our human lives. For a music teacher to incorporate such an understanding into her work is polarizing; the idea either makes perfect sense or seems bewildering and crazy. Former student Jonathan Brown recalls his orientation meeting at the beginning of Masters study:

When we first got to Juilliard in the fall of 1998, all the new violists had to meet with the department chair. Not just Karen Tuttle's students, but those from all the studios, freshmen to DMA. Samuel Rhodes was the co-chair of the department at the time, but he couldn't be there: so it was only Tuttle running the meeting. Basically, this was supposed to be a meeting going over the rules and procedures... The first thing she says is, "Okay, now the first thing, you need to find your way around this building, because you're going to waste a lot of time if you don't know where you're going." The building was a maze to all of us, so that was certainly something we could agree on... Then she changed topics: "Now I'm going to tell you a few things about music. I'm going to tell you the ingredients to be an artist: if you want to be a musician, you have to communicate. And one of the best ways we have of communicating is lovemaking." The freshmen in the back were getting a little uncomfortable! "If you have the ability to say, 'Oh, YES!' (accompanied by a thrust with her fist), then you're communicating." You can only imagine the shock of the assembled new violists at the Juilliard School! ...It was really something.²

Tuttle's first teaching job was as William Primrose's assistant at the Curtis Institute of Music in 1945; now in 2002, she teaches students at both the Juilliard School and Curtis. In between, she has taught at various schools and festivals, and given countless master classes. Over the course of her career, we can only guess how many

² Jonathan Brown, telephone interview by author, 26 November 2001.

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viola and chamber music students she might have taught: 1,500 would be a conservative estimate. However many people Tuttle has taught, the number who know something about her teaching is undoubtedly many times larger.

Much of this project is based on primary sources and many of the articles were written in interview format, which presents both advantages and challenges. With so many pages of interviews there was no lack of resources; the challenge was to find the strands within that created a story. Also, Ms. Tuttle was always generous with her time and very open in discussing all topics. She feels very comfortable using her own remarkable life history to teach, and has done so throughout her career. In her teaching, she focuses on her formative musical experiences that are most relevant to the maturing student. Discrepancies arose between sources in the course of writing, particularly the biography section. The controversy of Tuttle's ideas accounts for some of these. The combination of her personality with these beliefs has created rumors of all sorts. Another cause of these differences is the subjectivity of human memory, particularly since many of these events occurred some time ago.

To study Tuttle's effect, we must first learn about Tuttle herself. The first chapter will be in two parts: a biography of her life, based primarily on articles written about her and various interviews, and a series of short biographies of those people she considers to be her primary influences, supplemented by her comments from interviews. The second chapter presents the principles of her pedagogy. Her philosophy presents an organizational challenge in that many concepts are multi-layered and interdependent. Discussion of her pedagogy culminates in her original musical concept, coordination.

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This chapter is based on articles she has written, articles written about her, and several interviews with Ms. Tuttle.

The third chapter investigates the influence Karen Tuttle's teaching has had on teaching. To research this area, nine former Tuttle students were interviewed. They were asked a set of similar questions that covered the many ways in which each learned from Tuttle, and what effect she has had on their teaching. This chapter is based exclusively on these interviews.

The conclusion draws upon the body of the study to more specifically identify the nature and degree of Tuttle's influence. Of her legacy in viola pedagogy, we will see particularly what is most groundbreaking and effective, and how this has made her teaching so revered.