



THE BULLSHEET

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Can We Just Slow Down? A critique of the performing arts at Denison

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(Submission)

Today I found myself glancing up from my music as I stopped singing and looked around to see if anyone else was confused. No, just me. Everyone else had their eyes glued to their pages as they seemed to keep up with the tempo of the music perfectly. My brain seemed to freeze as the choir instructor, once again, counted us in at a pace that was too fast for me to even comprehend what was happening. I wanted to be brave and ask him to slow down the pace of the music, just so it would make more sense, but I couldn't.

See, like many people, I need to be taught information slowly and clearly, in order to be able to understand it. This is why it is very difficult for me to look at a piece of music that I have never seen before, and be expected to sing it right away at full speed. It seems like such an unrealistic expectation for anyone, and yet, that is what we as performers are expected to do. Which brings me to my main point: the performing arts are incredibly demanding and unforgiving, and Denison is no exception.

To provide some background, I am a senior with a vocal performance minor. I have been singing and reading music since I was ten years old. In school, I devoted nearly all of my time to practicing music by coming to school early every single morning. I auditioned for and participated in music festivals with the best singers in my home state. Music is something that has always allowed me to express myself creatively, and it is also something that has always made sense to me. This is why I was very excited to receive a very generous music scholarship along with my acceptance letter to Denison.

I was so honored to receive such an amazing opportunity to continue my musical education and keep singing at Denison. However, in the past three years, I have never doubted myself more as a musician and a performer. For a while I thought I wasn't very talented or maybe I just wasn't good enough to keep up with everyone else. It's hard to know your worth as a musician when music is art, and art is subjective. It's also hard to feel like you are a talented and worthy musician when everyone else seems to understand something that you don't. It took me until very recently (as recently as the moment I looked up from my music in choir practice today) to realize that I was looking at all this in a way that was entirely incorrect. It's not that I'm bad at music, or that I'm not as good as I thought I was. I am very good at music and I know what I'm doing when it comes to this subject. The problem is that people learn in many different ways and at different speeds, and the performing arts world has not evolved to accommodate everyone.

As I mentioned before, I learn best when something is explained to me slowly and clearly. I have ADHD and my brain processes information at a much slower speed than some other people. In many of my classes, professors consider students with learning disabilities and they recognize that every student learns differently. They try to present information in a way that is accessible to all types of learners. Why haven't we made the performing arts accessible to all learners?

Last week I auditioned for the musical. For the first round of auditions we were told what pieces we should prepare only two days prior. One song had to be a contemporary piece, a genre that I have never worked on. I either had to learn a completely new piece in two days or do something I already knew and perform a piece that did not fit the genre the directors requested. I chose the latter. After that, I was invited to a round of callbacks, where I was given only a few days to learn a piece of music that I was expected to perform. The directors provided no detail on what they wanted us to do for the role until we were standing on the stage for the audition.

Up until that point I had practiced the role in a certain way and taken creative liberties regarding the character I was playing. When we got on stage, the director told us the vision he had for the character and how he wanted the role to be interpreted. This vision did not match how I had practiced the role at all. I was faced with another decision, try to completely change how I performed the material on the spot or perform it how I had practiced. Again I went with the latter. The audition cut was a dialogue followed by singing. When it was my turn to go, I heard that familiar countdown, too fast for me to comprehend what was happening. He rushed me from one part to the next, not even sparing me a few seconds to think. I missed multiple entrances, and looked completely unprepared for my audition. I was not unprepared, I had done it perfectly when I practiced before.

Auditions are brutal. We are expected to learn new music in a matter of days and perform it without any mistakes. We are also expected to adjust to the director's vision within a matter of seconds. It all happens way too fast for me to keep up. And you know what? I should not have to keep up. I should not be rushed to learn new material and rushed to audition when so much of the performance process is about practicing. We would never be expected to put on a whole show after only a week of preparation, so why are you judging my worth as a musician based on the thirty seconds you give me to perform a song that I have never even seen before yesterday?

So, to the professors down in Eisner, many of you are not teaching music in a way that is accessible to everyone. Many of you are holding auditions and assessments that make it difficult for some of us to succeed. I know what I'm doing when it comes to music, but I have never been given a real chance to show off my talents at Denison.

NCAC Ranking

Griffin Conley,
Wisconsin Ally

The following is the NCAC schools ranked by their distance to Culver's. Talk about food for thought!

Wabash College: 1.75 Miles

Ohio Wesleyan University: 9.67 Miles

Oberlin College: 13.88 Miles*

Denison University: 16.93 miles**

Hiram College: 19.66 Miles

Wittenberg University: 21.12 Miles

College of Wooster: 23.67 Miles

DePauw University: 25.81 Miles

Kenyon College: 36.51 Miles**

*Opening Soon

** Same location



Staff "Will They Survive?" Box

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 Selah "Yes" Griffin, Junior Editor

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