



OFFICE OF THE DEAN
THE SHEPHERD SCHOOL OF MUSIC

September 28, 1995

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I have been asked, as dean of a relatively large university-level music school, to comment on the normal practices in our school with regard to physical expressions of support and/or congratulations.


It is a very wide-spread practice in this school for members of the faculty and students to embrace one another, not only after concerts and recitals but after periods of separation such as the return from summer vacation or the Christmas break. Such hugging frequently involves a formal sort of kiss on the cheek or on both cheeks, a European practice which has become quite wide-spread in our own arts community here in America. I think it is fair to say that not everyone in the Shepherd School chooses this method of expression, and those who do not clearly have no difficulty indicating to their students and colleagues that they prefer a simple handshake or no physical contact at all in the situations mentioned above. Nothing is made of this lack of demonstrativeness. It is accepted by everyone as personal preference, to be respected. In most situations, however, especially after recitals, the performer(s) signal equally clearly that they rather expect to be hugged while being congratulated and that they are grateful for this warm sign of support. Almost everyone responds to that expectation, but again a few confine themselves to a handshake or verbal expression, and that is accepted for what it is. I have never heard either students or faculty colleagues discuss this matter or comment on anyone's personal choices with respect to it. It seems clear to everyone that the physical contact involved in these greetings or congratulations is both a genuine expression of warmth and at the same time altogether innocent.

In this respect let me comment on the nature of our common work in a music school since it differs considerably from the *modus vivendi* of a literature department or a science department, in my experience. Making music is, of course, very demanding intellectually and imaginatively but also physically. Teachers frequently need to make physical corrections with their students, and this is best done by the laying on of hands. It is necessary to gauge the degree of tension in various muscles, shoulders, etc., by actual physical contact. It is also necessary to deal with matters of breathing and posture in this very direct hands-on way. To make the point more clearly, I have witnessed hundreds of master classes in which student and teacher have never seen each other before, and within minutes, the teacher has grasped the student's shoulders or has his or her hand on the diaphragm or the throat. If this sounds more like a medical exam than a music lesson, it is simply because the two are in many respects indistinguishable. Good performance teaching, like good medical practice, is largely a matter of accurate diagnosis. Students who wish to know the truth and teachers who wish to impart it do not stand on misdirected modesties when getting to the sources of problems and their solution. In my view this realism about the body and the necessity of physical contact it entails has a lot to do with generating an atmosphere in which more social forms of physical expression are also taken for granted. Add to that the fact that performance produces in most of us a great deal of anxiety and tension. When the performance is over, there is considerable relief, and as in most similar life

situations, physical expressions come more naturally to almost everyone than upon more perfunctory occasions.

In my thirty years as both a dean and a college president, as well as a faculty colleague and teacher, there have been some occasions when I have given an embrace of a different sort. This occurred when people have come to me in considerable duress over personal loss, frightening medical diagnoses, inability to cope with work or other setbacks. Though I am not much of a natural hugger, nor particularly effusive, I have not held back from trying to give comfort and encouragement where that seemed appropriate. This has never been done as an imposition. It is not at all difficult for people to signal what is appropriate and what is not. I have done this in the hallways with others around or in my office when no one else was present, with men and with women. It seems to me a natural form of human expression, and in the circumstances that elicit it, ambiguity is not an issue. It will be sad if we lose our capacity for such human expression through fear of threatened misinterpretation. Every day I see physical expressions in this school that remind me we are all sexual beings; but every day I see vastly more gestures that say we are much more than that: friends, colleagues, all attempting difficult things and in need of the support of others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Hammond". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Michael Hammond
Dean

MH/mmw