

## Merry Peckham: On Rehearsing, Performing, and Growing as a Musician (And Person!) in Chamber Music

### Description

It could just be my imagination, but I feel like I have this hazy recollection of my teacher asking me if I'd like to play in a quartet, and being decidedly unenthused about the idea. I mean, I was probably 10, I don't think I'd ever really listened to any chamber music at that point, and my part definitely didn't seem nearly as cool or exciting as whatever concerto I had my eye on.

Of course, despite those initial reservations, some of the most profound and enduring lessons I've learned about both music *and* life, some of my most cherished memories, and some of my most enduring friendships (including podcast guests, and oh right, my wife!), all came in the context of my chamber music experiences.

I know the circumstances of the last 18 months has made it difficult to have "normal" chamber music experiences, but now that we're starting to reengage in live quartet, trio, and other small ensemble rehearsals, I thought it might be an interesting time to chat with someone who has spent decades immersed in chamber music, not only as a performer, but teacher and mentor as well.

I was curious to see what sorts of things we could be doing in rehearsals, or in our own individual preparation, to make the most of our time together, and grow not only as musicians, but as people too. Because while I did say some of my most cherished moments in music came in chamber music – some of my most oh-so-close-to-hulking-out-and-smashing-everything moments in life occurred in chamber music too. ?

I first crossed paths with today's guest when I was maybe 11, when she and her quartet colleagues visited Columbus, OH to do some coachings, and I was having one of my very first quartet experiences. Much has transpired in the ~~20 years~~ ~~30 years~~ 35 years (OMG!) since, but she remains as thoughtful and enthusiastic as I remembered her being then. =)

### Meet Merry Peckham

Merry Peckham is currently Chair of Chamber Music at The New England Conservatory of Music, and Associate Director for the Perlman Music Program. She is also a founding member of the Cavani Quartet, with whom she played for 30+ years, and also hosted *Offbeat*, on WCLV 104.9 (Cleveland) for over a decade.

- 2:51 – How, much like a family, the way a group's members interact with one another can change over time, and how "what may work for the first concert may not work for the 100<sup>th</sup> concert."

- 9:26 – Merry mentions Ted Lasso! And makes a very cool observation about the difference between one’s role as a coach and one’s role as a teacher.
- 10:30 – Merry’s “linear” vs. “organic” approach in coaching.
- 13:15 – A general formula for how to approach the first rehearsal of a piece.
- 14:33 – Have you ever gotten into a disagreement with someone in your ensemble? If so, this one phenomenon could be why. =)
- 17:37 – What it really means, on a practical level, to listen in a chamber music context.
- 21:14 – Merry’s basic score study principles.
- 23:46 – Why Merry went from being a hard-core play-off-of-the-score-at-all-times person, to playing from the part instead (though this doesn’t mean it’s right for everyone).
- 25:20 – Are you a looker? Or a non-looker?
- 31:03 – Merry talks a bit about recording, and we wonder about whether recording is maybe not as necessary on a day-to-day basis as when you are working on solo repertoire.
- 36:54 – I ask Merry about imposter syndrome, and feeling like the weak link in the context of an ensemble.

## Notes

- 7:57 – I alluded to a study which analyzed several rehearsals of a professional string quartet: [Fantastic four! Problem-solving processes of a professional string quartet](#)
- 21:14 – Merry talked about some of her fundamental to-do’s when doing score study. Here’s a CelloBello video, where she gets into a bit more of this: [CelloChat with Merry Peckham \(3/22/2020\)](#)

## More Merry

In addition to Merry’s CelloChat about practice fun and games ([here](#)), I think you’ll also enjoy this *Living the Classical Life* interview: [Chamber music was like a narcotic for me. - Merry Peckham](#)

And if you’re a violinist, violist, cellist, or pianist interested in studying chamber music with Merry (and other terrific musicians) this coming summer, you can learn more about chamber music at the Perlman Music Program here: [PMP Chamber Music Workshop](#)

### Date Created

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