



Alberta Wind Symphony Rehearsal Lab

Presented by
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Music Conference Alberta 2018

Saturday, October 27, 2018
Sutton Place Hotel
Edmonton AB



**Music Conference Alberta
October 2018**

Diagnose, Prescribe and Follow-up: Providing students with information and tools so they can self-diagnose, remediate and assess.

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Common symptoms and tendencies in developing bands ...

- Lacking concept of ensemble sound
- Balance issues
- Lacking characteristic tone and resonance
- Playing every beat equally – weight on every note
- Repeatedly breathing on bar lines
- Flat line – no shape
- Heavy tongue or no tongue at all
- Articulations – lacking skill and concept
- Compressing rhythmic figures
- Dragging long note values/Speeding up fast note values
- Rushing pulse in rests
- Not subdividing as an innate practice
- Playing mf – f – no dynamic range/contrast
- Poor approach to balance and blend – lack of awareness and listening
- Un-unified approach to all things musical – articulations, volumes, shape, expressive markings, etc.
- Lacking intention and purpose – an unified vision for the piece
- Lacking emotional commitment and engagement

Rehearsal Techniques

Warm-Ups

1. Buzz buzz buzz, l o n g t o n e s and fundamentals
2. Low before high; slow before fast; long before short
3. Chorales, scales, instrument specific standard practices
4. Individual vs. collective
5. Sound before sight (no repertoire in warm-up)
6. Teach and embody the value of warm-up (ie. Warm-up yourself in front of the class every day)
7. Incorporate something for sound, fingers, tongue and ensemble skills/concepts

Rhythm and pitch accuracy

1. Sing sing sing – there should engaged singing in every band class
2. Separate rhythm and pitch
3. Remove instrument and mechanics
4. Air play rather than clapping – move fingers, hands and air
5. Rhythm vs. literacy – “Mr. Smith, how does it go?”
6. Back to the beat and subdivision – always go back to basics and to improve something more complicated or challenging
7. Use text or syllables to prepare or reinforce rhythms and rhythmic motives

Ensemble Sound

1. Pass the Bb – one sound and pitch/many colors
2. Blend vs. balance – two different beasts that require different interventions!
3. Reverse score order entrances and releases
4. Eyes closed – reduce the senses and visual overload
5. Marching stand partners, section, family, ensemble
6. Resonance first! Resonance comes from the body then the instrument.
7. The softest voice in a given texture dictates the dynamic level for all voices in that texture
8. Adjust dynamics based on tessitura

Time and Tempo

1. Player on rim of snare tapping subdivision
2. Air play subdivision
3. Internalizing beats and subdivision – activity playing down beats and off-beats one beat at a time; saying then playing
4. Un-conducted playing every rehearsal! Develop independence and active listening
5. Function and approach to anacrusis
6. Get to “the point” – a metronomic approach to cadences and arrivals
7. Slow music – fast air/quick tongue/quick fingers

Technique

1. Scales and configurations of scales - different tempi
2. Take small chunks out of context
3. Rehearse fragments in reverse order
4. The “bop” approach
5. Repetition
6. Change rhythms/articulations to technical passages
7. Slow and steady wins the race!

Phrasing

1. Eliminate bar lines
2. Play a shape – create a journey with clear destination – where are you going and how are you getting there?
3. No two notes can be same weight, volume or intensity
4. 3 commandments!! “Thou shalt not breath on a bar line, at the same time as thou neighbour or right before the most important note in the phrase unlesssssss....!”
5. Motivate the sound from within – create intensity and purpose
6. Lead with your air

Intonation

1. Beginning of year activity (groups of 3); revealing individual tuning tendencies
2. Tuner – the big debate?
3. Interactive listening and pitch matching to develop intonation skills
4. Singing – develop inner hearing and audiation skills
5. Playbacks – always model and engage active listening
6. Unison exercises
7. Identifying higher and lower (bright, shiny, dull, saggy)
8. Holding students accountable for instrument specific tendencies and remedies

Articulation

1. Every day – exercise a variety of articulations and develop a vocabulary
2. Speaking and experiencing contrasting articulations – Toh!
3. Mind your “ts” and “ds” – use articulations that engage the air and tongue
4. Avoid lip-activated consonants – “b’s” “p’s”
5. Focus on the AIR
6. Develop a vocabulary
7. 3 parts of the note – unify!
8. Watch your weight!

Awareness and Active Listening

1. Harmonies – exercise identifying note of neighbor – then 2 chairs away, etc.
2. Unify!
3. Listening for instrument lowest to you
4. Smack dab in the middle!
5. Frequent directed listening, questions and peer constructed solutions
6. Circle band/ mixer – don't get too comfortable; change seating and perspective

Interpretation

1. Deciphering most important material at any given time. Foreground, middle ground and background OR primary material vs. secondary material
2. Phrase lengths
3. Cadences
4. Contrast! Where, and more importantly how?
5. Emotional intention – what's the affective shape and journey?
6. Constructing unified purpose and meaning

Teaching fundamentals through chorales

1. Ensemble sound – tone quality, blend, balance and intonation
2. Listening
3. Air support, endurance and phrase extension
4. Expression and artistry
5. Percussionists ALWAYS play and participate – not exempt from ensemble fundamentals and “slow” music
6. Music history – composers, time periods, styles, characteristics
7. Theory – chord progressions, part writing, chord structure

Thank you for attending the session today. If you have any questions or comments about this presentation, feel free to contact me at

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Best wishes to you and your students!