



Future Music Educator Toolkit



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STRATEGIZING SUCCESS

Four Tips for First-Year Music Teachers

By Bob Phillips

STARTING A NEW TEACHING JOB is an incredibly exciting and challenging moment in a young teacher's career. In the midst of all the start-up chaos, here are four tips that might be helpful to new teachers.

1. TAKE THE TIME TO PLAN

Taking time to plan will save hours each week and is an investment in your professional development. Make sure to use a planning tool of some kind. Create lesson plans for each class and save them for future use. At the end of each week review what you did and evaluate your students' progress so you can better prepare for the following week. In addition, plan out each concert period and your entire year. Be sure to check your school schedule for important test dates, grading periods, and anything that you are responsible for or could affect your time on tasks with students. Mark all such activities into your long-term plan sheet so you aren't caught off guard.

2. ASK FOR HELP AND SEEK OUT MENTORS

If you are not assigned a mentor teacher, find someone in the music department that can answer your questions. A mentor

teacher can help you with student/parent issues, school atmosphere issues, community relations, and anything that is unique to your school. If you are having an issue with a student or parent, always ask a mentor teacher or administrator for advice. If your mentor teacher does not teach music, find someone in or out of the district that can help you with specific band, orchestra, or choir questions. Another great source for help is professional organizations such as your state Music Education Association, and national organizations such as ASTA, NAFME, ACDA, and others.

3. CHOOSE REPERTOIRE FOR A REASON

Choosing music is a key part of a successful music classroom. Your music should always be aligned with your curriculum. Be sure all the skills you are teaching are being supported by the repertoire students are working on. As an example, if you are working on certain rhythmic skills, such as dotted-quarter notes, then some of your repertoire should include dotted-quarters. Planning repertoire for each concert as well as the entire year is an important part of curriculum mapping. A great resource for discovering appropriate repertoire is state festival lists.

4. CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF EXCITEMENT

Teach your students to love music, not just respect it. Expose them to a variety of styles and genres and to play/sing with passion. If you are excited about the music, they will be too. Play great recordings/videos and engage the students in the music making process as much as you can. Instead of being the "sage on the stage" make sure you are teaching them to make musical decisions every day. Teach technique in order to give students the skills necessary to create expressive and passionate performances and then challenge them to do so. Technique is a means to an end.



Bob Phillips is renowned both as an educator and an innovator in string education. As a teacher trainer, and with over 27 years of experience in a public school classroom, Bob brings a wealth of knowledge and a sense of humor to his presentations.



Tips for Using Social Media to Create Awareness for Your Music Program

By Billy Lawler

SOCIAL MEDIA is a tool to be reckoned with. Just think: what other platform could bring so many of us together by challenging us to dump buckets of ice on our heads, but also divide us in masses over the color combination of a dress?

Whether you're on social sites personally, professionally, or both, there's no denying its power when used as a tool to spread awareness, spark conversation, and connect with people you may not have otherwise ever encountered.

In marketing, advice is often given to meet the customer "where they are." As a school music teacher, ensemble director, or private teacher, your customers are your students and ensemble members, and more than likely, those students are on social media. Why not try to meet them where they are?

Here are ideas for utilizing the power of social media to help create awareness for your music program and provide

opportunities for recruitment. Please be sure to find out what the guidelines are for your school or district before executing any of these ideas.

1. HAVE A PRESENCE

First things first—have an online presence! If you don't already have a profile of any kind that represents your choir, band, orchestra, piano studio, etc., now would be a great time to start one. If you've already done this, skip to tip number 2!

If you're new to this idea, your first question might be, "Which social media site(s) should I be using?" Great question.

Consider casually asking your students what's "popular" among them and their peers, and let that be your guide. Specific age groups might utilize a certain platform more than others. Here are some considerations to take when selecting where to establish your program's presence:

- **Facebook** is a great platform that allows opportunity for website traffic (in case you have a dedicated website or web page) and engagement—the best of both worlds! The downside is that Facebook's newsfeed algorithm puts more emphasis on personal connections, so your page may have a difficult time competing for visibility.
- **Instagram** is very useful for engagement and visibility (use relevant hashtags when posting!), and having a dedicated online "portfolio," if you will, for your program. Video posts are limited to 60 seconds unless broken up into an album or posted on IGTV, and it's not as great for directing website traffic since you can't directly link anywhere from your posts.
- **Twitter**, similar to Facebook, allows for both engagement and linking, but the lifespan of a post is much shorter, so it's much better for live, in-the-moment updates. There are also more

limitations in terms of messaging, and videos are limited in length as well.

- **Snapchat** is very popular with younger generations, so it's great for meeting your "customers" where they are. However, it's mostly used as a multimedia messaging platform, and best used by businesses who can offer sneak peeks, contests, coupons, and more.

Try not to get hung up on the nitty gritty—admittedly, these details can get overwhelming. Start with one platform, and see how it goes. Invite your students and ensemble members to be the first followers, and encourage them to share the page with their friends and family.

Also note, this is not about becoming an overnight music education influencer—keep it simple and fun! Understanding that time to dedicate to social media management is quite limited among hundreds of other priorities, so consider nominating a group of students to manage the profile as a side project. It will certainly provide some applicable marketing experience, and it may give them an extra sense of pride.

2. POST QUALITY VISUAL CONTENT, CONSISTENTLY

Take into consideration that this social profile may be someone's first impression of your program, so you'll want to make sure it showcases all of the great things your program has to offer.

VISUALS

As a rule of thumb, always have something visual to share—visual content is the most engaging. This means lots of photos and videos. The good news? All of those photos and videos captured at festivals, retreats, rehearsals, recitals, concerts, group activities, etc., are great ways to show off the fun and exciting perks of being a member of your musical community (please be sure to get any required release forms if required by your school or district). Not to mention, it's also a great way to track progress and document

achievements! Students and parents may be motivated to share these accomplishments with their friends on their personal pages too, providing organic amplification and referrals to your program (encourage them to tag your page so others can easily find you). For those who aren't able to attend a certain concert, consider live streaming. It can be as simple as "set it and forget it," and live videos perform very well on social sites.

QUALITY CONTROL

Additionally, use your best judgement regarding the visual quality of your posts. Is the photo blurry? Is the video shaky? Is there too much background noise? Remember, any particular post could be someone's first impression to your program, so weigh the level of quality against the importance of having content at all before making anything public.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Again, knowing your time dedicated to marketing is limited, take into account the importance of posting consistently. Each platform works a little differently in terms of what's standard regarding frequency, but at the end of the day, you can only do so much. Again, consider having a student or group of students help out with this—it's safe to assume they're pretty social savvy.

Also worth noting: it's probably best to seek permission from students and parents before including them on posts for an "official" social media page. Social safety, first.

3. SEEK AMPLIFICATION

Once you've got your social page set up and some quality visual content to round it out, consider these options for getting more eyes on your posts.

TAG INFLUENCERS

Do you plan to share performances from your end-of-year concert or recitals on your page? Why not try tagging the song composer, arranger, artist, publisher, etc.? You never know who

might re-share something with their audience, increasing your visibility and credibility! This in turn could certainly attract more students, and create awareness for your program.

INCLUDE HASHTAGS

Also, particularly on Twitter and Instagram, research some popular, relevant hashtags, and include a variety of them in your post. This will tie your content in with specific topics and themes across the platform, so as users search for #pianorecitals or #holidayconcert, your posts will be part of those results and may attract additional engagement and awareness from outsiders. Also consider creating your own, unique hashtag for your music program and use it in all of your posts.

Inversely, you can search these terms and engage with others' posts who have used those hashtags, too. This will help you establish yourself as a member of a musical community, and even allow you to connect with other, similar music programs around the world. How cool is that?

TIE-IN WITH HOLIDAYS

Did you know there's a national day to celebrate the tuba? Or a whole month dedicated to celebrating jazz? Use these "holidays" as opportunities to tie-in what you and your students do every day to celebrate music. These occasions are often trending on social platforms, so consider adding to the buzz. Also consider weekly student spotlights, recognizing the individual members of your ensemble, the instrument(s) they play, their favorite bands, etc.

ADVERTISE

Let's start by acknowledging the fact that "music program" and "social media advertising budget" are two terms that don't really belong in the same sentence. In fact, it's well-known that many music programs are struggling to have a budget at all.

With that said, with only a few dollars to spare—and when done correctly—social media advertising can make a big impact.

Facebook advertising provides options to target users based on age, interests, location, connections to your page, and many other criteria. Capital City Men's Chorus used Facebook advertising and targeting to nearly double in size!

QUIZZES, POLLS, GIVEAWAYS

These are all fun options for getting users involved with your page(s). Consider creating a music theory quiz, or polling your followers for repertoire suggestions for your students, or giving away a free private lesson to spark interest from new students. People often enjoy giving personal input, and love opportunities to win things.

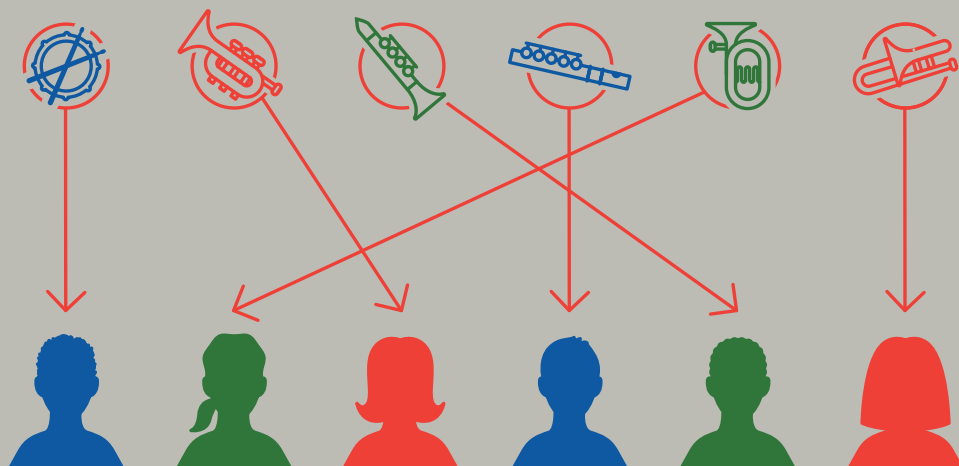
4. ENGAGE AND HAVE FUN

When people interact with your content, do your best to engage back. Knowing that there may not be much time to dedicate to maintaining a social media presence, it is important to spark and participate in conversations, or at least acknowledge the interactions you are receiving.

At the end of the day, the whole purpose of social media is to create and share content, and to participate in building and maintaining networks. You should be proud of the work you and your students put into your music program each year, and sharing the results can be part of the fun. The positive feedback you'll receive can be another rewarding aspect to your long list of achievements!



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There are many ways to address this, and one article is hardly a comprehensive how-to tool. But it is important to think about this topic when recruiting for beginning band every year, and it is helpful to make attempts to steer some beginners in a direction as their skills improve and their musical personalities develop.

1. START WITH BASIC NEEDS

Start with a realistic expectation of the number of students who typically sign up for beginning band each year, while identifying a target instrumentation that resembles a well-balanced ensemble. Perhaps you could focus on the most commonly chosen instruments before tackling the rest.

2. INTRODUCE STUDENTS TO THE INSTRUMENTS

It is always helpful to have each student hear every band instrument and see them up close before making a decision about what they want to play. If there is a way to teach them to make a sound on each instrument, then the band director can assist in making a decision that may provide the most successful experience.

3. FIND THE STUDENT'S NATURAL ABILITY

One method of helping students select their instruments is to go with what they seem to have a natural ability for. For instance, students who can immediately produce a good flute sound, or buzz successfully into a brass mouthpiece are going to enjoy band more quickly on those instruments than students who are challenged by those techniques.

4. ASK QUESTIONS

Of course, other issues should be considered. Are braces happening soon? Does a family member play an instrument already, or does the family already have an instrument for the student to use? Does the instrument fit the student's height or hand size? And perhaps most importantly—what does the student really WANT to play? And WHY?

8 Steps for Helping New Band Students Select Their Instruments

By Robert Sheldon

THE BAND IS ON STAGE as the auditorium lights dim in expectation of the first sounds. And what a glorious sight it is! A full complement of double reeds and low woodwinds, a rafter of horns, a squadron of trombones, and a platoon of tubas! Depending on our own band room experiences back home, we are either thrilled with what we see, or filled with envy. How did they get so many students in band? How did they achieve such great instrumentation? Why can't my band be like that?

While there are a number of forces at play when trying to increase band membership and achieve full instrumentation, the most significant might be the personality and reputation of the band director, and the recruiting/retention program in place. These and other issues could be discussed and researched for weeks on end providing various degrees of enlightenment. But for today we will focus on one aspect of this equation: the way teachers guide students in selection of an instrument for beginning band.

5. BALANCE THE BAND & PROVIDE INCENTIVES

Once all of this is considered, the next goal is getting a balanced instrumentation. If we want to guide students to instruments they might otherwise not select on their own, there needs to be an incentive. Having a talented and personable musician available to demonstrate how much fun it is and how good it sounds could encourage a young student to choose to play the tuba, or whatever other instruments might be needed. Sometimes that is all it takes to create interest. And if the band has some school instruments available, parents can often get on-board with a limited, initial financial investment.

6. COMBINE APPROACHES

Some band directors find it helpful to ask students to choose two or three instruments, and observe the student's initial experience playing them. Then the director can place the student on an instrument based on that analysis and evaluation, while also considering balanced instrumentation. Doing this also ensures that the student has input on what instrument is selected for them to play.

7. BE FLEXIBLE

After all of our efforts, we may still not have the kind of instrumentation we desire. But it is important to note that achieving good instrumentation is a process that doesn't end once the beginners start learning to play. This is something to be monitored and tweaked all the way through high school, and in some cases beyond. One of the many things I love about the *Sound Innovations for Concert Band* method are the instructional DVDs. If a student ever decides to switch instruments, or learn to play another in order to help improve the balance of the band, these DVDs (now available free of charge as streaming video at SIOOnline.Alfred.com) can help get an aspiring young musician ready to contribute to full instrumentation with relative ease. This works particularly well at the high school level when students are often more agreeable and interested in learning a new instrument as their music and life experiences grow.

8. ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT

During the high school years it is not uncommon to find a number of students roaming the halls that used to be in band years ago, but quit for one reason or another. If the band in your school is a place where students are happy, treat each other with respect, are enjoying their musical experiences, and feel pride in their achievements, then it can definitely be a place where other students you have yet to meet will want to be. Sometimes all it takes is an invitation from the band director to join. It is also worth noting that the band members themselves could be an excellent source for finding students who might be interested in learning to play an instrument, or getting back into this wonderful activity we all know and love.

There are many reasons for not having the number of students or the instrumentation we want in our band program. Lack of budget, uncooperative guidance counselors, conflicts with athletics, unsupportive administrators, etc., etc. We all know this can be a very long and self-defeating list. But in the end, a talented, positive, and enthusiastic band director with a real passion for music who loves teaching kids will be successful in creating a special and meaningful experience for their students. Persistence, positive attitude, professionalism, and providing great music for our students to perform will go a long way toward helping every student experience the joy of making music!



Robert Sheldon is one of the most performed composers of wind band music today and the lead author of Sound Innovations for Concert Band. His compositions embody a level of expression that resonates with ensembles and audiences alike. Mr. Sheldon is currently Director of Concert Band Publications for Alfred Music.



Checkpoints for Successful Instrument Setup from the Start

By Bob Phillips

SETTING STUDENTS UP FOR SUCCESS starts on day one with how to sit, stand, and hold their instruments. Getting it right in the beginning is better than having to remediate in later years.

In very large beginning classes, it is not possible for teachers to be “hands-on” with each student, the same way a private teacher would. The primary solution is a clear process that takes advantage of the principles of large muscle movement with clear checkpoints. This process works well for all situations and addresses the issue of muscle tension in the students with a setup motion that promotes relaxation or the release of muscle tension.

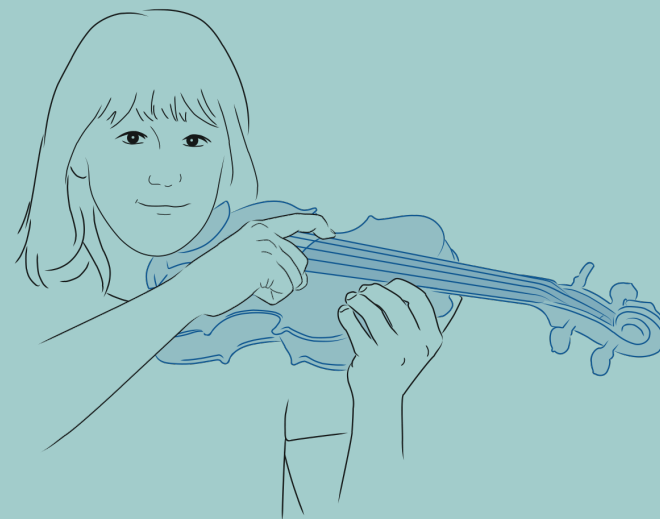
A good example of this is setting the bow on the string. Lifting the bow directly to the instrument adds tension. If students hold the bow over their head first, and then lower it down to the string, the large muscles relax as the bow lowers.

Individualized instrument checkpoints can be done for each instrument at the same time using common number commands solving the issue of keeping all students engaged. Once the students learn the sequence, the teacher calls out the number and thus leads the student through a set up that results in a tension-free position. Here is an abbreviated list of the checkpoints I used. Personalize this routine as you wish but I would recommend using one every day until holding the instrument correctly becomes a habit.

VIOLIN AND VIOLA

Basic steps to establish correct standing or sitting position:

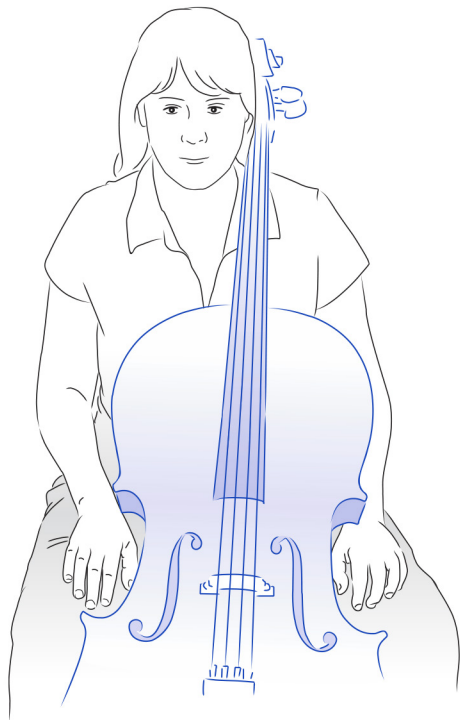
- Checkpoint 1: Hold the instrument, scroll up facing out, in front of the student’s face with left hand holding the neck and right hand on the bottom right bout.
- Checkpoint 2: Lift instrument above the head. (This lifting motion usually adds muscle tension.)
- Checkpoint 3: Lower instrument to left shoulder. (This motion usually releases tension.)



CELLO

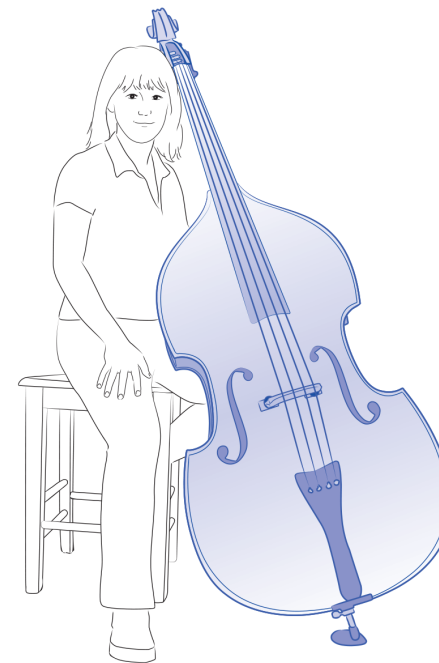
Basic steps to establish correct sitting position:

- Checkpoint 1: Hold instrument at arm's length facing out, in front of the student's body so it is vertical resting on the endpin.
- Checkpoint 2: Bring the instrument back until it touches the body. (This motion usually releases tension.)
- Checkpoint 3: Slightly turn the instrument to the student's right.

**BASS**

Basic steps to establish correct standing or sitting position:

- Checkpoint 1: Hold instrument at arm's length in front of the student's body so it is vertical resting on the endpin.
- Checkpoint 2: Bring the instrument back until it touches the body. (This motion usually releases tension.)
- Checkpoint 3: Slightly turn the instrument to the student's right. (How much to turn depends on whether they use French or German bow.)



Bob Phillips is renowned both as an educator and an innovator in string education. As a teacher trainer, and with over 27 years of experience in a public school classroom, Bob brings a wealth of knowledge and a sense of humor to his presentations.



CONCERT TONIGHT!

PERFECTING YOUR CONCERT PROGRAM

Tips for Selecting Repertoire

By Scott Watson

THERE ARE SO MANY WORTHWHILE OLD AND NEW PIECES from which to choose, and from so many gifted composers; yet our time to meet and work with students is limited and precious. With cutbacks to student contact time faced by many programs and the urgency of preparing for the next performance (always around the corner), directors are increasingly using concert selections to teach curricular musical concepts (“Teaching Music Through Performance”). More than ever, choosing repertoire to place on the stands of students in ensembles is just about the most important decision directors make. The following are some approaches that can help you narrow the choices in order to focus on the right music to program.

DIFFICULTY

There are educationally appropriate reasons for selecting music of varying difficulties for every ensemble, regardless its rating or level.

- **Easy reads** are pieces which allow an ensemble to sound good early on in a concert preparation cycle. Because they are confidence builders, they are great for opening and closing rehearsals, and for digging deep when it comes to musical expression.
- **In your wheelhouse** pieces are ones well-suited to students’ abilities. These selections take reasonable effort but don’t exasperate. They leave time for the ensemble to work on lots of musicality so, in the end, everyone sounds their best.

- **Challenge pieces** stretch the ensemble and—if they'll ultimately be performed (rather than just rehearsed for the experience)—will need a commitment of extra time and effort by all involved.

Getting the right mix of “easy reads,” “in your wheelhouse,” and “challenge” pieces is crucial. Err on the side of the former and your ensemble will peak early and be bored. Err on side of the latter and you risk cramming the piece by rote, exasperating students and robbing them of the joy they should be experiencing when making music. Depending on the lengths of specific pieces and the number of weeks of preparation devoted to concert preparation, I suggest a good balance of approximately 30% “easy reads,” 60% “in your wheelhouse” and 10% “challenge pieces.” For example, if there will be seven selections in an upcoming concert, program two “easy reads,” four or five pieces “in the wheelhouse,” and one “challenge” piece.

I encourage directors to select a little less demanding music in order to devote more time delving into tuning, phrasing, balance, tone, and musical expressiveness. As a composer I have been in the awkward position of being invited to guest conduct a piece of mine that is really too difficult for the ensemble. I think to myself, “Ok, this is rough; but if only the piece were a half-a-grade easier, the students would be nailing it.” If there are pieces you want to program with your students, but are too difficult for them now, set goals and make a plan to move your program forward so you can in due time. But in the meantime, we should be more interested in having our students experience well-crafted music making than being able to say they've played a certain grade level piece. When a concert recording sounds great, our pride is well justified, and including the title of a difficult piece on a printed program means little.

GIVE A SHAPE TO YOUR SHOW

Creating an aesthetically pleasing arc for the presentation of music in a concert is similar to the kinds of creative decisions a

composer makes with a single composition: How can I make the introduction and closing sections inviting and compelling? After developing an opening theme, what contrasting music can keep the listener engaged? How might the concept of tension and release offer satisfaction to the listener? What special things can set this piece apart and make it memorable?

Certain programming choices are considered conventional because they are broadly appealing. For instance, many concerts open with an upbeat, exciting, shorter selection. Pieces which demand more mental engagement—due to their length, slow pacing, or dissonant harmonic vocabulary, etc.—are usually programmed fairly early when the listener's ears are fresh. Works for a soloist and the ensemble more often than not occur halfway through a program before the soloist might get fatigued. Fun, popular and novelty selections often appear near the end of a concert—your patient audience has earned it! By the way, all of the above is applicable whether or not your show follows a theme such as “Winter Holiday Music,” “Music from Stage and Screen,” or “Music Around the World.”

Despite these traditions, there really is no single correct plan for a concert. Instead of a boisterous finish, you might choose to close a concert brightly with an audience sing-along, or reflectively with a beautiful, softly ending tone piece. After several varied shorter works on the first half of a program, you might devote the entire second half to a lengthy, mature work. The important thing is to have a shape for your show, a narrative of sorts that keeps your audience (on stage and in the auditorium seats) engaged.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW...

There are many formulas out there for creating a good shape for your show. One such approach used by directors to lend balance and variety in programming is based on the good luck couplet used by brides when dressing for their wedding: “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.” “Something old” focuses on preserving tradition and calls

for a piece that has earned itself a place in core repertoire. “Something new” allows directors to feature some wonderful recent pieces, highlighting the fact that music is a vibrant art created by living composers. Transcriptions and arrangements—“something borrowed”—bring orchestral classics, opera arias, reworked choral works, or even a Broadway or film music medley to band students and their audience. “Something blue” could be something a jazz- or pop-influenced work, or anything colorful and contrasting.

REPERTOIRE LISTINGS

I frequently ask director colleagues some form of the question, “What are the best pieces you’ve performed with your ensembles?” Interestingly, when I find the time to look over their recommendations there are always some (sometimes quite a few) that are not a good fit for my students. The problem isn’t the ability of my colleagues to discern good music, it’s that each school ensemble is incredibly unique, with many variables (contact time, instrumentation, community support, standout performers, etc.). The same can be true with repertoire listings and music reviews. On the other hand, if the same piece turns up again and again in multiple listings, it’s probably worth a closer look.

Recommendations—whether from trusted colleagues or highly regarded reviewers—must be followed up by examining the piece. When I examine a score, I want to feel as if the composer or arranger had written this particular work for me as a commission—knowing my strong and weak sections (both in technique and numbers), who might be able to serve as soloist, and what items I was hoping to teach with the piece (i.e. dotted rhythms, certain chromatic notes, phrasing, unison tuning, etc.). There are so many great pieces out there; given enough time, you can find just what your students need.

CONCERT DURATION

If you’re fortunate to be blessed with hard working students and ample rehearsal time, leaving you with more repertoire prepared

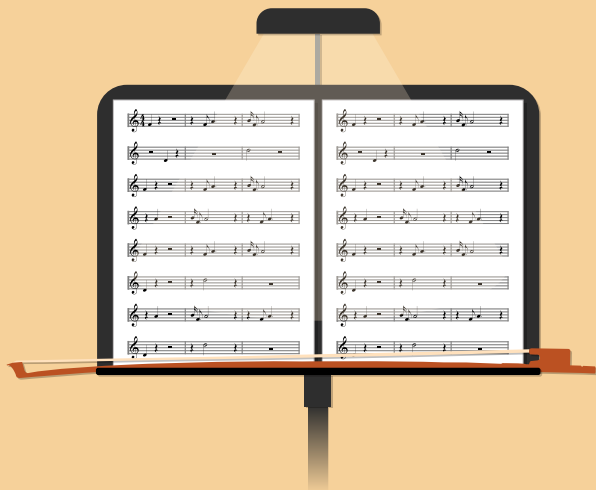
than a reasonable concert length will allow, you need to find more performance opportunities rather than hold marathon-length concerts! Perhaps have a chamber music night. Or, allow selected soloists and small ensembles to augment the concert of a colleague who feels challenged filling an entire program him/herself. The concept of “less is more” applies here. When your concert ends, leave the audience wanting more rather than having had enough!

FINAL THOUGHTS: MARGIN

A lot of the above ideas actually stem from my reading many years ago Richard Swenson’s fine book, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Swenson, who defines “margin” as the space that exists between ourselves and our limits, offers sage advice about focusing on what’s important and avoiding the stress that naturally results by stuffing too much in our lives. Leave some margin in the volume and difficulty of the music you choose and you and your students will find yourselves engaging in more dynamic rehearsals that include—in addition to the normal drilling of passages—time for meaningful discussion, student reflection, and moments of higher musical excellence. Ultimately, margin allows everyone to enjoy more the very special music you have chosen as you rehearse and perform it.



Scott Watson has taught instrumental and elective music for 30 years and is an award-winning composer. Watson presents numerous professional development sessions/workshops for music educators and frequently serves as an honor band guest conductor.



Using Repertoire to Create Positive Ensemble Experiences for Students

By David Pope

WHY IS CHOOSING REPERTOIRE IMPORTANT? Repertoire selection is one of the most significant decisions made by ensemble directors. Thoughtfully selected repertoire can properly develop students' technique from concert to concert, cultivate musicality, energize daily rehearsals, and motivate students to practice outside of class. My main objective as a director is to foster successful experiences for my students, and the first step in creating positive experiences is choosing repertoire that meets students' musical needs, engages them in the music making process, and excites them about playing their instrument.

To meet these objectives, directors should strive to avoid common pitfalls when choosing music. Directors should get out of their own way, understand their students' performance abilities, know the specific techniques required in each piece, and determine what motivates their students. Considering the four following strategies below will help directors create positive learning experiences for their students.

1. SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

The most common complaint from festival adjudicators is that ensemble directors over program. Many directors choose concert repertoire with their hearts instead of their heads. Common examples of this include: programming specific repertoire because directors played it when they were in middle or high school, a longing desire to teach a masterwork, or blindly choosing music based on the way it sounds. Those decisions often lead to unrealistic expectations and result in directors becoming upset when their students do not rise to the challenge. Directors transfer their stress onto students during class, and that negatively impacts the rehearsal environment.

To avoid going down that road, pay closer attention when sight-reading new repertoire of music with your students. Did you stop more than four times because chaos reigned and the ensemble fell apart? Were the students in the back of the ensemble lost the entire time? If the answers to those questions are "yes," consider selecting different repertoire that will lead to a greater level of student success. Yes, most students want to push themselves to learn hard music, but it can be demoralizing if they are barely keeping up. Playing hard music should not be the goal. Make creating positive and memorable musical moments the objective in your classroom.

2. KNOW YOUR ENSEMBLE

Part of setting realistic expectations is accurately understanding your students' playing abilities. Before selecting repertoire for each concert, determine where your students are in their musical development. Determine which concepts they perform proficiently and those that need additional practice to reach a satisfactory performance level. With that knowledge, directors can choose repertoire that nurtures their students' musical development.

Another component of successful programming is knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your ensemble. Effective

programming involves emphasizing the strong sections of your ensemble, limiting the exposure of inexperienced sections, and knowing how hard you can push your students for each concert sequence. Avoid featuring your inexperienced sections and chose repertoire that highlights the strengths of your ensemble. If I have strong celli and weak violins, maybe “Canon in D” is not the best option for my ensemble. While “Canon in D” is a wonderful work, it does not give the ensemble the best opportunity to succeed. Also consider the amount of rehearsal time for each concert sequence. If you have a limited number of rehearsals due to state testing and field trips, consider that when selecting repertoire.

3. DETERMINE THE REQUIRED TECHNIQUE

Once you narrow down possible repertoire choices for your next concert, dissect each piece to determine what playing techniques are required. Establish what left hand (i.e. shifting, vibrato, various finger patterns, extensions), right hand (i.e. bow strokes, tone colors, stylistic playing, articulations), and music reading skills (i.e. note range, changing clefs, symbols, terminology) are necessary to produce a high level performance. That information, paired with in-depth knowledge of your students’ performance abilities, will help directors determine how many new concepts occur in the repertoire.

I use a basic math formula to determine the amount of new skills I want to introduce in new repertoire. I also consider what playing techniques I plan to refine. For beginning 6th grade students, creating proper set-up and playing position is my main goal. As a result, I skew heavily toward refinement (70%) over new skills (30%). I do not want to overwhelm my students with too many techniques at once. However, the ratio changes as students age because they have a solid set-up and better multi-tasking abilities: 7th grade (40% new skills and 60% refinement), 8th grade (45% new skills and 55% refinement), 9th grade (50% new skills and 50% refinement), 10th grade (55% new skills and 45% refinement), 11th grade (60% new skills and 40% refinement), and 12th grade (65% new skills and 35% refinement). To create

positive experiences, it is important to set students up for success through detailed analysis and proper planning.

4. CONNECT TO EVERY STUDENT

Another step to successful programming is choosing repertoire your students want to perform. If you are like me, I am sure you have selected at least one piece of music your students did not like. If your ensemble population mirrors mine, you have a diverse group of students with an even wider array of musical preferences. Yes, it is essential to teach students about specific genres and important pieces of music, but what impact will that have if they continuously do not like our repertoire choices? Will it cause students to lose their desire to play in our ensembles?

Even though directors may prefer specific genres of music and think our students need to know specific works, consider programming works outside of your comfort zone to engage all students in your classroom. Find a variety of new pieces that engage all of your students. For example, *The Emerald Falcon* (Meyer) resembles energetic movie music, *Aspire* (Phillips) is soulful and lyrical, *Gaelic Trilogy* (arr. Palmer) leans on traditional Irish fiddle tunes, and Trans-Siberian Orchestra arrangements are orchestra rock music. As long as the repertoire meets your students’ technical and musical needs, choose works that match their personalities. Remember to choose repertoire that inspires your students to love music, and we can use a variety of genres to reach that objective.



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Building Encounters with Excellence into Every Lesson or Rehearsal

By Scott Watson

PERFECTION IS A STANDARD that, in almost every case, can never be met. How many lines can really be drawn perfectly straight? And for those of us working in the arts, what exactly does “perfect” mean? Can an oil painting or a musical performance be considered perfect?

THE POSSIBILITY OF PERFECTION

A while back I was working with my second-year (5th grade) alto saxophone section. I was rehearsing a small gesture, just a few notes, and it sounded rough. Each time we repaired a performance error another one emerged. Someone missed an accidental. Another held a note too long for the staccato articulation. Then another rushed the rhythm, and so on. I explained that there was no reason that we, as a section, shouldn't be able to play this small phrase perfectly. One of the more insightful girls in the section asked aloud, “Isn't it impossible to play it absolutely perfect?” This was the perfect (excuse the pun) time to launch into a favorite pedagogical sermon of mine!

TWO HORIZONTAL LINES

Perfection, I pointed out, is not the point, but rather the striving for perfection, or for beauty, or for excellence. I drew two horizontal lines on the board, one very high near the top of the board and one in the middle. The top line represented perfection; the lower line represented being average (or with older kids, mediocrity). If we strive to play our saxophones perfectly but (and here I drew an “x” just shy of the top line) fall a little short, you can see we're still pretty darn good—some might call it excellent! But if we only strive to be average (and here I drew an “x” just shy of the line in the middle) and fall short because we don't care enough, then we're not even mediocre. You see, there's no shame in aiming for a model of perfection.

Those saxes and I played a few more times and eventually they all played together in a way that was really excellent, especially for such young players. All seven played the right notes, were rhythmically tight, and used the correct articulations. It was only a small phrase, and frankly I don't have the time in a 30-minute group sectional to always lead them to an experience with such excellence, but I strive to do just that at least once in every group lesson or rehearsal I lead.

ENCOUNTERS WITH EXCELLENCE

This idea of bringing students into an encounter with excellence at least once each rehearsal isn't original. I first heard it from my college mentor and good friend, Ken Laudermilch. Ken led the wind ensemble and taught trumpet at West Chester University while I was an undergraduate Music Education major there. When he was still teaching, Ken allowed me to use his university wind ensemble to record a piece I had recently written as a commission for a middle school band. In return, he asked me to talk to the students about teaching in the schools. I rehearsed my piece for about 15 minutes. They more or less “nailed it” when they sight-read it! After polishing a few spots, I told Ken I was ready to record. Ken gave the students a five-minute break and pulled me aside, saying, “I don't want them to get off this easy.

Do you mind if I work on the piece a little bit?” Returning from the break, Ken proceeded to tear apart and put back together every phrase I had thought was fine. Nothing was overlooked—phrasing, attacks, releases, dynamic contour, subtle tempo shifts. When he finished, the piece sounded truly glorious! And better still, these fine university players had an encounter with musical beauty even with a middle school band piece because a master teacher led them there.

AN EXAMPLE OF EXPECTATIONS

Years later, when I read Peter Boonshaft’s *Teaching with Passion*, I found the same principle. I think of Peter as one of the preeminent wind band conductors on the planet at this time. He’s also one of the authors of the *Sound Innovations* instrumental method. In his excellent book Boonshaft suggests that, “in every rehearsal we need to make one beautiful pearl.” In addition to serving as what he calls a “beacon” of perfection, Boonshaft points out that these moments give our students an example of our expectations, and they encourage progress as students realize they can produce something (no matter how small) that is truly beautiful.

I think it’s no accident that two of the most talented music education professionals that I know—Ken Laudermilch and Peter Boonshaft—both employ this technique of leading students to an encounter with excellence in their rehearsals. Whether it’s a university wind ensemble or young saxophone section, doesn’t everyone deserve to bump up against something truly beautiful, revel in it, and know that he or she is responsible in part for creating that beauty?

In each meeting with your instrumental students at any level, I’d like to recommend you find something to give them an encounter with excellence to serve as a model, a “beacon of perfection,” for all their music making.



Scott Watson has taught instrumental and elective music for 30 years and is an award-winning composer. Watson presents numerous professional development sessions/workshops for music educators and frequently serves as an honor band guest conductor.



REHEARSAL HACKS

Tips and Tricks to Engage and Energize Your Ensemble

By Becky Bush

SAVE TIME, ENGAGE STUDENTS, AND MAKE GREAT MUSIC with these everyday rehearsal hacks for energetic, quality rehearsals! These are a few favorites from my essential rehearsal strategies that I use every day with my own students.

HACKS TO ESTABLISH REHEARSAL PROCEDURES

Start with the basics! Train your students to enter the room quickly, quietly, and with purpose. They are expected to be in their seat warming up one minute after the bell rings. Rehearsal procedures need to be taught, and expectations need to be established and re-established often throughout the year.

- **Start rehearsals the same way each day** (i.e. when the director gets on the podium, the ensemble should get quiet).
- **Start with playing!** Music is why they are in your classroom and it needs to be their motivation to be ready to start quickly.

In some situations, it might be helpful to have a student lead tuning or a daily warm-up so the director can deal with broken instruments, etc. No matter what routine you chose, train the ensemble, and set high expectations.

- **Practice starting and stopping** when the director cuts off and make it a timed competition or a challenge. I often pick a piece they can play through and cut them off at least 10 times throughout the piece. After I cut them off, then I continue immediately on in the music. I use verbal reminders such as “Two people are still playing” or “We can be faster than that” the first few times so that by the time we finish the exercise they are stopping immediately and without talking.

HACKS FOR ACHIEVING CORRECT POSTURE AND POSITION

Model, model, and model some more! Students need to see correct instrumental posture and position on a regular basis. Here are some ideas for providing students opportunities for movement.

- **“Do what I do.”** Use nonverbal instructions by having students mimic you as you perfect their position by tapping your pinky, shaking your arm to relax it, etc. Give them three seconds to get from their very best couch potato position to perfect playing position.
- **Be a swaying ensemble** as you warm up in order to release tension. Don’t forget their bodies!
- **Stand and play** for instruments where this is appropriate. It is difficult to play with a correct arm position if the body is not grounded and relaxed, so don’t skip this step!
- **Play lots of position games.** Have them grow an inch, use starbursts on violins to keep them parallel to the floor, use a pencil to practice fingerings to help curve fingers, etc.

HACKS FOR TEACHING THE NOTES

- **Slow the music down.** This is basic, but often overlooked. This will give all students including the slower readers a better chance at learning the passage. Challenge the more advanced students by layering skills. For example, play it slower but challenge them to play it with the correct dynamics, with great tone, with better intonation, etc.
- **Separate skills and simplify passages** with singing, clapping, pizzicato, removing all slurs, fingering along while singing, etc.
- For those tough spots that students need to hear **use echoes by measure** in a tempo. This requires no talking and is just measure-by-measure echoing the teacher in order to quickly break down passages.
- For fast passages, **change the rhythms** at least six different ways and then return to the printed version (i.e. swing it, change eighth notes to dotted eighth and sixteenth note patterns, add slurs, remove slurs).
- **Improve finger coordination** by practicing piano sections forte, marching in place while playing, emphasize accidentals by standing anytime they play the accidental in the music or kick out your left foot.
- **Use disguised repetition** such as one stand partner point and the other play, play a section in a different moods or styles.
- Require them to have a pencil on their stand and **write in fingerings, shifting, and reminders.** This will save a ton of time in the long run and will help set the standard for an efficient rehearsal.
- In class **playing checks are a great way to encourage practice** in-between playing tests. Quickly hear one stand, one section, or one row at a time to check for learned parts.

- **Walk and teach**—get off the podium and walk around the ensemble. You will hear better what needs to be fixed in the back of the section and it will encourage greater engagement from students in the back of the ensemble.

HACKS TO IMPROVE INTONATION

- **Use drones to improve intonation** by having some sections play a drone, and the other sections tune a scale to the drone. You can also use a tuner and have them try it with their eyes closed to increase their focus on listening.
- **Play the scales in different octaves** as is done in the *Sound Innovations* series.
- Use a method book that **utilizes chorales!**
- Don't forget with younger players to **practice manipulating the pitch** so they physically know how to raise and lower the pitch. When I point up they raise it, when I point down they lower it, and when my hand is flat they try to match it perfectly. At first young students will change it drastically so work with them to alter the pitch just slightly in order to refine the physical and aural skill.
- String players need to **practice all pizzicato passages arco** for intonation accuracy.

HACKS TO PRACTICE RHYTHM AND TEMPO

- **Use rhythm flashcards** to teach rhythms before introducing them in repertoire. These are easy to make on Finale or by hand. Review them in warm-ups with aural echoes and on scales. Rhythmic reading skills can also be easily learned with the new [SmartMusic Sight-Reading Builder](#).
- **Work on subdivision** by having one section play repeated notes while the rest of the group plays their rhythm or changes a printed passage to all eighth notes and no slurs.

For example, if there is a dotted quarter note they would play three eighth notes instead. This will force them to feel the rhythmic subdivision.

- To learn rhythmic figures in repertoire try **separating the skill by clapping it, marching it, saying it, singing it, and then playing it**. Practice with a metronome or rhythmic beat app.

HACKS TO TEACH MUSICALITY AND ARTISTRY

- In order to improve dynamic range be sure to **teach the technical aspects** such as stick technique, breath support, and bow distribution.
- **Play reverse dynamics** for an entire piece so if they see a printed forte, they play piano, etc. This creates awareness and is a lot of fun for all any level of ensemble.
- **Play “Follow the Crazy Conductor,”** where the director or student conductor gets to make up the dynamics as they go and the ensemble must follow! This can also be used for tempo, style, phrasing, etc.
- **Use descriptive words, analogies, and imagery** such as “mournful,” “somber,” “wistful,” and “tranquil” to help achieve style and mood.
- **Demonstrate phrasing by speaking a sentence** and putting the emphasis on different words. Have the ensemble make up their own sentences and try speaking it how they think the phrase should be played. Then play the phrase each way to experience the difference.
- In order to work on balance, ensemble skills, and following the conductor, **have students move seats and then listen around the room**. They can also spread their seats out across the entire room, sit in circles, or with section leaders in the back of the ensemble.

- **Follow the leader** can be used to work on ensemble playing. Teach them how to lead as they play and then pick students from different areas of the ensemble to be the conductor from their seat as they play!
- **Student conductors can be used to work on watching, following, and leading**. In order to force them to watch, put a student conductor in front of each section or one for each half of the ensemble and they have to follow them even though the other part of the ensemble is doing something completely different!
- **“Mystery Detective”** is my all-time favorite hack for any level of ensemble! I have students close their eyes, then I walk around and tap 5-10 students on the shoulder. Have them open their eyes and anyone that was tapped has to play incorrectly (slightly out of tempo, with the wrong style, out of tune, etc.). Play a few phrases or a scale and then they have to raise their hands and guess who the mystery people were. Be sure to encourage finding students across the ensemble!
- Finally, **video and audio-record the ensemble** so they can listen to and see themselves and realize they need to exaggerate musical concepts for them to be effectively communicated to an audience! As they give comments after listening, teach them to start with positive comments because junior high and high school students are experts at finding the negative and we all need to learn to find the positive in ourselves and our performances too!



Becky Bush, Orchestra Director at Jenison Public Schools, was String Editor at Alfred Music, Adjunct Professor at Grand Valley State University, St. Cecilia Youth Orchestra Conductor, and founder of the Hudsonville Schools orchestra program. A graduate of the University of Michigan and GVSU, she has presented at national music conferences.



Music Sudoku Activity for Students





























ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT ACTIVITY to provide to a substitute teacher? How about an extra credit assignment for students to practice notation? Print the free musical Sudoku activity below, and challenge your students to solve the puzzle. (And, here's the answer key for grading!)

HOW IT WORKS

The grid below includes 81 squares, divided into nine blocks that are further subdivided into nine squares. Each of the nine blocks must contain all of the musical symbols provided at the bottom of the page within its nine squares. Each symbol can only appear once within each row, column, and block.

Music Sudoku

Fill in the blank spaces with the available musical symbols so that each row, column, and 3x3 box contains all 9 symbols.

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Available Symbols



Music Sudoku

Fill in the blank spaces with the available musical symbols so that each row, column, and 3x3 box contains all 9 symbols.

Available Symbols



Tip: Identify & discuss these symbols with the class prior to the activity.

Teacher Version



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