

Performance Evaluation Preparation

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Philosophy of Band Preparation/Teaching

I am a nuts and bolts kind of guy so I feel that it is important to know where you are going with each rehearsal of your band. I've never been one to put a lot of stock in written lesson plans, but you must know where you are going, in order to accomplish goals in rehearsal or you are wasting time (yours and the students). Furthermore, we have all heard performances where you had to ask yourself, "What did they do in rehearsals"?

With that in mind, I want to present a concept that may be beneficial in your rehearsals with your students.

Some band directors are really good at preparing the full ensemble for performances but it may at times be at the expense of the individual student and the development of their talents. When you hear this sort of band, the full ensemble sounds great, but when you hear the individuals, you wonder how it was done.

Some band directors are really good at developing the individual student within their band, but are not good at developing the ensemble for performance. When you hear this type of band, you may notice there's lots of individual talent in the group, but they don't seem to know how to work together.

I believe a mixture of the two types of teaching philosophy is best, such that students are encouraged and required to improve individually while techniques that will enable them to work together for a superior performance are also emphasized. Every rehearsal should contain both elements of this teaching philosophy.

Every Rehearsal Is Like a Private Lesson

A good outline for a private lesson is:

- Warm-up- teach proper techniques of warming up that develop tone, breathing and intonation (listening skills).
- Rhythm Study- work on rhythms through a variety of methods to develop independence in individuals while reading music.
- Technical Study- work on exercises that develop finger technique and articulation patterns.
- Etude or Music Study- bring together the various aspects of what you've already been working on to prepare a piece of music.
- Sight Reading- while rhythm study and technical exercises sort of touch on this, you still need to bring it together in a pertinent way with new musical selections.

If you conduct every full ensemble rehearsal with the same outline, you will discover that over time, students will develop as individuals and so will the ensemble. The results of such effort are exciting to witness, as students become confident in their ability to produce beautiful music and blend together in an ensemble.

Warm-Up

I'm not going into much detail here except to say that each Warm-Up should contribute (as much as possible) to the overall goals of the rehearsal: either to improve the individual or improve the full ensemble. There are many things that can be done including long tones, lip slurs, breathing exercises, matching pitch, style of articulation (accents, tenuto/legato, staccato), etc. Try to have a routine that is effective, but at the same time, add some different aspects from time to time to keep it from becoming boring.

Rhythm Study

This is possibly the most important aspect of any rehearsal and often overlooked by many band directors. Develop a system (any system is better than none) of counting and playing rhythms that will enable students to become able to read rhythms on their own. The use of rhythm sheets, books about rhythm and counting rhythms in your music will help pull it together (mentally) for the student.

Technical Study

Students must learn scales and arpeggios. Students in middle school can learn all twelve major scales (at least one octave) if taught and high school students can learn minor scales as well. Learning to move their fingers and slides is of major importance for their individual development as well as the group. Again there are various books that teach scales, find some and start using them. The development of technique will enable your students to learn new music faster.

Students need to learn the eight basic articulation patterns and be able to use them in scale studies. As students become more and more comfortable with articulation patterns, they will learn them more easily in the music you are studying.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, illustrating eight articulation patterns labeled A through H. The first staff contains patterns A, B, C, and D. The second staff contains patterns E, F, G, and H. Each pattern consists of a sequence of eighth notes. Patterns A, B, and E are simple eighth-note runs. Pattern C features a slur over the first four notes. Pattern D features a slur over the last four notes. Pattern F features a slur over the first four notes. Pattern G features a slur over the last four notes. Pattern H features a slur over the last four notes. A small number '5' is written below the first note of pattern E.

Etude or Music Study (This is where we get down to business.)

Music Selection

The first and most important step in preparing for a performance is the selection of music for the program. If you select the correct music, the students have a chance, if you select the wrong music, you will be disappointed in the final product.

Choose music that will be accessible for your group. You have to know their strengths and weaknesses. If you have a strong instrument section; choose music that will show them off. If they are technically strong, don't pick something that will be too easy for them and bore them. They can become discipline problems if the music isn't interesting to them.

If you have an instrument section that is weaker, don't pick music that is out of their range of ability. It is O.K. to challenge, but be reasonable. I often hear bands trying to play music over their heads and while that is one teaching strategy, remember that no one is going to remember what level of music you play as much as the rating you receive. Choose something harder for the next concert and let the Performance Evaluation be something that is reasonable.

Take into consideration key signatures, time signatures and technical requirements as you consider the music for your performance. Watch out for ranges in all instruments, but especially the brass. If the range is too high, the brass may have difficulty producing a pleasant, in-tune sound that can blend when it needs to. Intonation is going to be directly affected by their ability to produce the sound in the range written.

Be careful not to select music that requires the musicians to do things that they can't do and you don't know how to explain. If you don't know how to develop range on brass or the technical aspects of the woodwinds you need to admit it early, **before** you select the music.

If you don't have certain instruments, don't choose music that calls for a solo on that instrument unless options are written in the music by the composer for alternate instruments to play that important part. Instrumentation should be a big factor in your selection of music. While we're discussing instrumentation, let's talk about tuba. If you don't have a tuba, it is going to be extremely difficult (possibly impossible) to make a superior at Performance Evaluation. It is O.K. to have keyboards playing the bass to support the tuba sound but you need to have a tuba. If you don't, you need to make a strong appeal at the beginning of the year for someone to play the tuba, letting the band know that success is doubtful without one or two tubas.

The woodwind section must have bass instruments as well, including bass clarinets and baritone saxophones. In fact you need to have all four ranges (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) represented in both the woodwind and brass sections unless you are doing very simple level one or two music. You still need a tuba even then. Later as we discuss balance and blend, this aspect will become clearer.

If you are to do multiple selections (2 or 3) choose music of different composers and

arrangers that is contrasting in style or musical periods. Try not to select two pieces that sound similar. There is much education to be done and selecting one style is not educational.

Finally there is a lot to be said for selecting music that the students will like. If they like it, you won't have to encourage them to practice it (at home) as much; if they hate it, you won't be able to get them to practice it.

Select music that is educational, on a level that you and the students can achieve, for instruments that you have in your band and make it entertaining for the students.

Rehearsal Outline

I have a mental outline of the different aspects of music preparation that in the early stages of my teaching career, I used step-by-step. Now I basically do all of them simultaneously as I go, making sure that every aspect gets covered. Here is the outline:

1. Notes, Rhythms & Articulations
2. Style, Dynamics & Phrasing
3. Tone & Intonation
4. Balance & Blend
5. Overall Musicality & Interpretation

With student teachers I teach that if you only get #1 done, you should expect to make a V at Large Group Performance Evaluation. If you get #1 and #2 done you should expect to get a IV. If you get #1, #2 and #3 covered you should expect a III and if you get #1-4 done you should expect to get a II. In order to get a Superior or I rating, you must complete all five aspects of the outline.

In reality nothing is that objective when it comes to musical performance and performance evaluation. In many cases if you do #1-4 you will do fine. If you do #1-5 the results will be above average.

Notes, Rhythms & Articulations

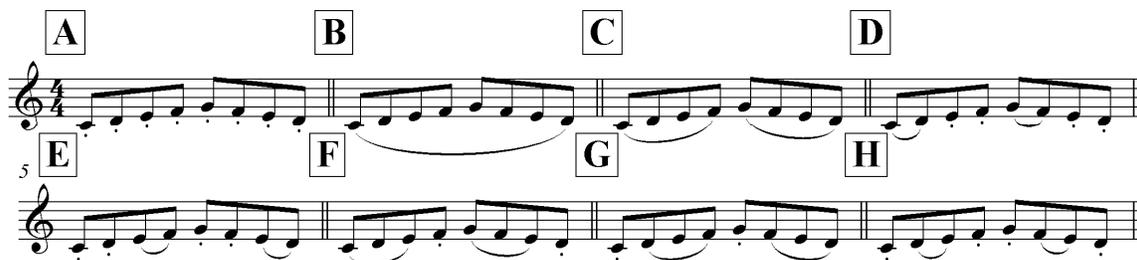
During Warm-up each day, you must prepare students to be able to execute notes by teaching major and chromatic scales. Make sure that your students learn the names of the notes. This will be very important when you begin work on intonation. Students need to be able to recognize the notes they are playing and the concert pitch that it represents. As you teach scales, have them finger and name the notes and know the starting concert pitch for each scale. It is not acceptable for the clarinetists to think for example that their "C" is a "Bb". It is good for them to know that their "C" is a Bb concert.

Encourage and promote the use of a fingering chart by telling the students that it is smart to look up fingerings that they don't know. If you catch them looking up a note,

praise them for not wanting to play the wrong note. You may have to provide fingering charts if you are not using a method book with one inside.

During warm-up each day, spend time counting or playing rhythms, especially in the time signature that you are playing in for the prepared pieces for performance. It is always good to select rhythms that are in the music, write them on the board (or project them from the Smart Board) and practice those until all students can understand and play them. This will be important for precision as you perform.

During warm-up each day, spend time playing technical exercises (while you teach scales is fine) on different articulation patterns. Especially spend time on the articulations patterns that are present in the music you are playing. Here they are again:



While you are rehearsing a particular selection, you must stop and correct notes, rhythms and articulation patterns. Make sure each student has a pencil on their stand by having pencil checks on a regular basis, so students will know the importance of always having a pencil and marking their part when they make a mistake.

I realize that every teacher has different abilities regarding ear training and that you may not be particularly good at hearing mistakes. I can't teach you ear training in an article but there are a couple things you can do to improve.

1. Spend time listening to performances of other bands on the music you are preparing.
2. Record your band often (once a week on Friday is not too much) and listen to it repeatedly over the weekend. Playing it in your car sound system while you are driving around is excellent, because every time you hear the same mistake, it will become an annoyance and help you to be proactive in fixing it in rehearsal.
3. Photocopy your scores and mark them with the problems you hear from the Friday rehearsal, and then work on those issues during the next week. Later in this article, I will address how to mark your photocopied score for improved rehearsals.
4. The worst place to listen to your band is on the podium. Get off of the podium and listen to small groups.
5. Playing through the music is not rehearsing. You must dig down by isolating small groups and analyzing what is going on, correcting problems as you find them.

Reality Check!

The process of correcting wrong notes, rhythms and articulations must not be consuming your time during the last 3-4 weeks before your performance. If you are working that late on those issues, you have selected music that is too difficult for your students.

Style, Dynamics & Phrasing

During warm-up at least once or twice a week, spend time playing simple rhythms with different styles. Play each one normally, accented, tenuto and staccato (and any other style you want to perform). As you rehearse, pay careful attention to stylistic markings in the score and make sure the students adhere to them. Be very careful to make sure that similar lines in different instruments play the style exactly the same way. Do allow the students to interpret articulation style; you must denote it for them.

As you work on dynamics, spend time discussing pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff etc. An easy to understand dynamic concept for students, is to use the analogy of a stereo with a volume control knob of 1-10, with 1 being pp and 10 being ff. You can work out more specific dynamic gradations using this concept and it is easy for students to grasp.

Phrasing is one of the more difficult concepts to teach and sometimes for even the band director to understand. There are two basic parts to phrasing; breathing (or not breathing/ extending the length of the phrase) and shaping of the melodic line. If you have trouble with this area, take out your instrument and play the different instrumental parts, making a note of where you are breathing and shaping the dynamics.

Phrasing is very important in the final performance because breathing in the wrong places can “chop up” the melodic lines and work against the shaping of phrases. You need to either sing or play through your selections and decide where students are going to breathe (or more importantly not breathe) and when they are going to crescendo and decrescendo.

Deciding where the musical line is going to “go” is important for the musical effect. Climactic moments must be thought through and taught to the students. Every student must know the shape of their phrase and the “high” spots in each musical line.

A useful concept is “tension and release”. Often, phrases build to a certain point (build tension) and then recede from that point to the end of the phrase (release tension). Most phrases are some variation of the “arch phrase”.

Climactic spots in the music must be decided upon (by the band director) and taught to the band so that they are clearly performed. This is part of phrasing and musical effect. Don't be “handcuffed” by a fear of what to do; not shaping phrases is like not coloring in a coloring book because you are afraid someone may not like the colors you chose. Any color is better than no color.

Tone & Intonation

I've heard it many times and I've said it as well, "tone and intonation go hand in hand". The fundamentals that are worked on to improve tone quality will improve intonation and the fundamentals that are worked on to improve intonation will improve tone quality.

There are three factors that govern tone quality: embouchure, air (breathing) and tonguing.

Embouchure is best taught in beginning band but can be improved as a student progresses. While there are many concepts of proper embouchure and tone quality, there are definite incorrect formations that will cause tone quality to be tight, pinched, too loose and flabby and unfocused. If tone is tight it will often register as sharp; if it is loose and flabby it will register as flat.

Air or breathing is the most important factor in producing a great tone. If you study the embouchures of great players throughout history, you will see many varieties of embouchure formation, some which look terribly "wrong". Air support and use of the air is what all of the great musicians will attest is the most important issue in tone production, even to the point of making their tone of a professional quality when their embouchure is questionable.

Tonguing is the beginning of every sound. The clarity or lack thereof makes the rest of the tone sound good or bad. The placement of the tongue is of major importance, but so is the amount of air support (or compression) behind to tongue. Students must develop a variety of articulation strokes and styles in order to interpret music correctly. The "tah" and "dah" tongue can be used in conjunction with accents, tenutos, staccatos etc. in order to produce a variety of interpretive functions.

Intonation has so many factors that influence it that books have been written about it and an extensive treatment is too much to address in one article. There are some major concepts that can be discussed briefly.

When tuning, always tune to a "tuning note" and teach students that they are only in tune on that note as long as nothing such as temperature, humidity, embouchure, and reeds change. All other notes on their instrument are in the "ball park" and must be adjusted by listening constantly. Students must be taught to adjust upward and downward and what it sounds like to hear the out of tune "beats" that occur. Subsequently they must learn to discern as the beats get slower and the pitch is matching.

Students can learn to listen and adjust and knowing the "tendency" notes on their instruments is very helpful as well. A simple chart of the notes on each instrument can be made and students taught to know their tendencies using the following procedure.

First, tune the instrument on their tuning note. Second, start at the bottom of the

chromatic scale playing each note slowly. Third, mark the tendency of the note whether it is sharp, flat or in tune. Doing this several times and marking each one will help the students learn which notes are out of tune on their instrument. After learning that certain notes are flat or sharp, teach them to lip up or down to get in tune.

Building chords is another important tool for teaching students how to play in tune. Pick any chord in the score and ask the students to play their note together. If you hear out of tune-ness ask the students to adjust it until they sound in tune. If they are unable to tune it by ear, spend the time going around the room tuning each note with the tuner allowing the students to look at the tuner until they get it in tune. Ask them to mark their music to remember to lip that note up or down. Placing an arrow pointing up or down above the note will help them remember.

Let's say for example that a Bb chord is out of tune. Have everyone with a Bb concert play and hold all together. If it sounds in tune go to the D Concert and do the same. Next check the F Concert. If there is out of tune-ness on one of the notes, there are several things to help adjust it:

1. Have the students sing the note (all together) and then play the note they are hearing, adjusting it to match the note they sang.
2. Ask the students to check the chart that you made previously and adjust up or down.
3. Use the tuner to check the individuals playing that note, allowing them to see the tuner and how much they need to adjust to get it in tune. Some directors hand out tuners in every section for the purpose of checking intonation as they go.

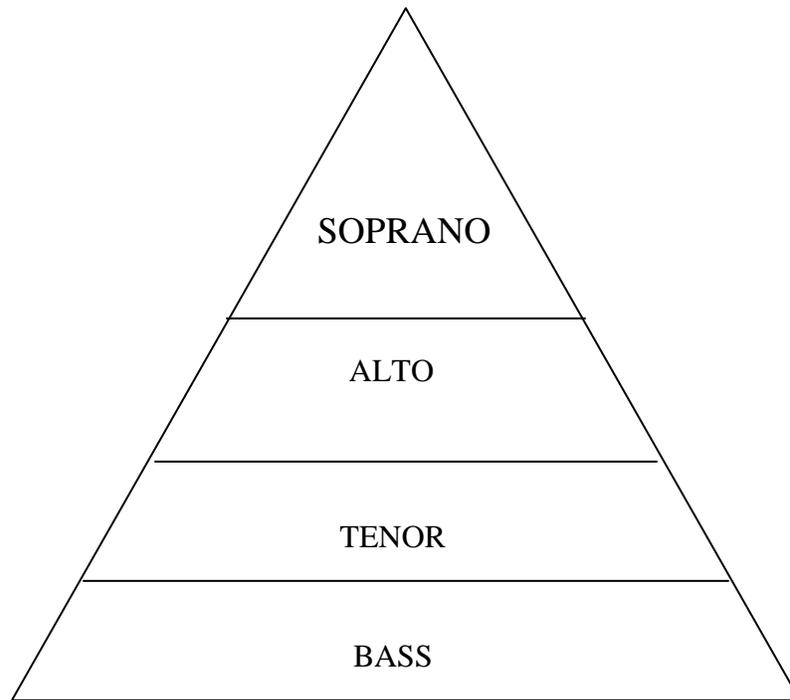
After getting each individual note in tune, play the Bb and hold, then play the D and hold, and then play the F and hold. As students hear the quality of an in-tune chord they will become more able to hear it in the future and quicker to adjust without all of the tuning procedures used above.

It will seem at first that this process is too slow, but as time goes on, your students will get faster and better at tuning and adjusting. As their ears get accustomed to hearing in-tune chords, they will get to the point where they will tune without the use of a tuner (at least not all of the time).

One last thought on teaching students to listen and adjust. During warm-up, have students play a note (F Concert is a good starting note) and play it around the room. Divide into sections and ask the students to play the note one group at a time. All of the other students will then listen and discuss which section (of instruments) had intonation problems. They will get better and better at hearing and later adjusting.

Balance & Blend

Francis McBeth in his book, *Effective Performance of Band Music* introduced a concept called the “Pyramid of Sound”. This concept is very important in building the balance and tone quality of each section as well as the full band. The concept is to produce the bass sounds most prominently, followed by the tenor (less), then the alto and finally the soprano instruments.



The bass tonalities are the Base of any good band sound. Use this concept in developing the balance and tone of each instrument section, the woodwinds, the brass and the full band.

There are three types of balance issues that must be considered as you prepare for performance: Section, Full Band and Melody versus Harmony

Within each section of instruments, it is important that the lowest parts are the base of the sound for that instrument. For example in the clarinet section, the third clarinets should play the fullest, followed by the seconds and last by the first clarinets. The first and second clarinets should play “inside” of the sound of the thirds. If the firsts and seconds are louder than the thirds you must ask the thirds to play out more or the firsts and seconds to play less.

Balance of course is affected by the number of players on each part, so put more players on third than on second and the least number of players on first. Remember also that higher pitches carry louder than lower pitches, so the firsts have to be in control of their upper register in every instrument and the thirds need to be confident in producing their part.

Within the woodwind or brass sections, you must consider all of the above in getting the proper balance, blend and tone qualities from them.

Within the full band the “Pyramid of Sound” is crucial to the success of your band. Use chorales to teach the concept to your students and insist upon it when playing any piece of music. Analyze the score to determine which instrument(s) are playing the lowest part in every phrase, and be sure to produce that instrument(s) the most. Balance the sound from lowest to highest at all times. Instruct the students to play inside the bass sound and not to stick out of it. Be careful not to subdue upper instruments too much or they will not develop embouchure for lack of air support.

The balance of the melody versus the harmony is extremely important in the interpretation of your musical score. The melodic line must predominate with clarity during the performance of every phrase. Counter melodies must also be considered in the over-all balance of things and all of this in relation to the harmony and accompaniment. Every phrase must be analyzed and decisions must be made to determine what the most important motifs are. All other sounds being produced must be subservient to the most important melodic lines.

Often when judging, I hear too much competition for what parts are important. The result is that the important melodic lines are covered up by the accompanying figures. Those motifs that should be in the foreground are relegated to the background by too much volume in the accompaniment. Keep the background, accompaniment in the background and allow the important figures to be in the foreground so they are heard clearly.

Sometimes it is difficult to sort out the various motifs and give the appropriate amount of weight to each part. While this is a difficult task and requires decisions on your part, it must be done and any decision is better than no decision. The use of recordings is very helpful in determining if the balance is working out. Remember, the worst place to listen to your band is on the podium. Making recordings helps in confronting this problem.

The “white note black note” concept is a very simple concept to help with balancing the various melodic lines. Furthermore, it is easy to explain to students and simple for them to learn to employ.

Teach your students when performing in band, to give more weight (volume) to black notes than white notes. In other words, play black notes louder than white notes. To take the concept a step further, play shorter notes progressively louder than white notes. Thus, sixteenth notes are performed louder than eighth notes and eighth notes are played louder than quarter notes.

This concept will work most of the time to help you and your students produce the proper balanced sound. It will not work however with ostinatos that are very common in today’s music.

It is easy to explain what an ostinato is and students can readily learn how to handle

them. Ostinatos are important the first time they are heard and should be produced with an appropriate volume that makes them predominate and become the foreground sound. After several measures, the ostinato pattern becomes monotonous and becomes the background. Often, other ostinato patterns begin and become the foreground for a period of time until something else comes in to take over the foreground position.

It is important to make sure that the ostinato is brought down in volume for whatever more important part comes later, whether it is a new melodic line of another ostinato. After being heard once, the repetitive line is relegated to the background where it is quietly performed until the dynamics or phrase demands indicate that something else should be done.

The white note black note concept demands that black notes be played the loudest within a phrase. The presence of ostinatos is an exception to this rule.

Blend is a product of tone, intonation, style, the length of notes (including releases), volume and tonguing. While that sounds pretty complicated it isn't.

Individuals stick out (don't blend) if their tone is rough, harsh, tight, flabby or has too much vibrato. Individuals stick out if they are out of tune. Individuals stick out if they play the wrong style. An easy to understand example is if you are playing a legato style and someone is playing in a marcato style, they will stick out. Related to style but not quite the same, students will stick out if they play notes a different length than the rest of the band. You will hear them hold over or release late. Individuals stick out if they play the wrong volume especially if they are too loud for the rest of the group. Finally individuals will stick out if their tonguing is different than the rest of the group.

In review, sounds don't blend for reasons involving the following factors:

1. Tone
2. Intonation
3. Style
4. Length of notes
5. Volume
6. Tonguing/Articulation

During warm-up, the use of chorales to teach tone production and blend is very helpful. Talk to the students about blend by pointing out the tones, styles, volumes and lengths that stick out. Carry the same concepts to each phrase of performance selections.

Spend time talking about and demonstrating the three people exercise. Explain that in any group of three players the middle person should be listening to themselves and comparing their sound to the players on either side. They should be equal in volume and not less. If all they can hear is themselves either they are too loud or the others are too soft. If all they can hear is the two on either side, they are either too soft or the

other two are too loud.

Quality of Instruments/Mouthpieces and Reeds

It is important to note that no matter how much effort you place on the right notes, articulations, rhythms, blend etc., none of it is possible unless the instruments and other hardware that your musicians are playing are of good quality. Playing on “toy” instruments (beginning band instruments, broken down instruments, Rico reeds, stock mouthpieces etc.) will hamper the band from reaching its greatest potential.

Instrument Inspection

Several weeks before LGPE let the students know that they will receive a grade for instrument inspection. Explain what your criteria for getting a good grade are going to be and the date for the actual inspection.

It is important to encourage the purchase of good quality instruments, mouthpieces and reeds. When it is time for Instrument Inspection, check the reeds of all woodwinds to make sure they have several good reeds before the event. Check brass to make sure that tuning slides are working properly, and that the bores are not “gunked up” with old Doritos, Twinkies and other “already been chewed” snacks.

Sectionals

Once a week, conduct sectional rehearsals for Woodwinds, Brass and Percussion to get into the finer details of the music. Use the time early to get notes and rhythms corrected, and then progress through the Rehearsal Outline as mentioned above (see below).

- Notes, Rhythms & Articulations
- Style, Dynamics & Phrasing
- Tone & Intonation
- Balance & Blend
- Overall Musicality & Interpretation

Individual Check-Offs

When I was younger, I scheduled time for every student to come in and play their music for me. I listened to every note of every student to make sure they were producing the right sounds to make the band sound good.

It sometimes became a private lesson for the student, but when your band is young, immature and inexperienced it really helps to get things clarified. It is a large price to pay but it works if you’re willing to go the extra mile.

Use the Sheets from Your Past

This may be one of the most important tips I can give you. Hopefully you have kept your Adjudicator Forms from Large Group Performance Evaluation (LGPE) for the last several years (or if you are new then just last year). Take a look at the areas where you received any “negative” comments or scores. If you see scores that are low, you must be honest with yourself and work to improve those areas. There is a tendency to blame things on someone else, the students, the judges, the acoustical environment and anything else you can find. Look first at yourself and work to improve the areas marked on your LGPE Score sheets.

In my own teaching career, I began to notice comments about balance. I was apparently allowing too much accompaniment to cover up the melody. I didn’t agree actually but as the pattern began to emerge, I decide to do something about it.

As I worked to clarify the melodic line and get the accompaniments to be supportive but not overpowering, a transparency came to the sound of the band and it was certainly a better balance. I didn’t want to listen, but I did and it improved my teaching.

I also heard from adjudicators that intonation was a problem. I purchased several books about intonation, learned several methods on how to instruct students to listen-and-adjust and things got better. Clarity and resonance improved in the sound of my bands.

Is it O.K. to call or email an adjudicator after a performance and ask what went wrong? Yes as long as you are cordial, non-confrontational, desiring to learn and not in any way attempting to assign blame to the judge. If you are clearly trying to learn and using their expertise and opinion as a tool to improve, most judges will appreciate your efforts to get better.

One note, after listening to 20 or 30 bands don’t be surprised if the adjudicator doesn’t remember too many details about your specific performance. It would be more advantageous to bring them in to work with your band next year, giving their expertise to you in rehearsal.

You must look at every category on the adjudication sheets and develop teaching strategies to improve your effectiveness in those areas in which a pattern of weakness arises.

Private Lessons

Before school bands there were Private Lessons. Mozart and Beethoven did not play in their school orchestra; they learned from qualified teachers one-on-one and practiced on their own. The public school music movement brought the opportunity to play an instrument to more people, but in some areas has hurt the ability to access good private instruction.

Consider starting up a private lesson program in which you bring in good teachers and

require that they teach for a reasonable price (without having to pay rent for use of your building) and with a curriculum that you design and ask that they use. If you need to, you can start beginning students with your best high school students at a price that is very reasonable to the student and a good deal for the high school student. You will need to watch over it carefully to make sure the high school student is maintaining a professional relationship with the younger student and are give good quality education.

Improving the individual abilities of your student performers will have a direct impact on the sound and capabilities of your band.

Group Lessons

In some areas private lessons are difficult to access and band directors bring in professionals to teach sectionals or group lessons. Many schools provide group flute, clarinet, trumpet, trombone and other instrument lessons to help the progress of their students. Either as part of the budget or through a small fee to each student, this method works well to help your students perform better on their instrument.

Improving the individual abilities of your student performers will have a direct impact on the sound and capabilities of your band.

Photocopy the Score

This may also be one of the most important tips I can give you.

To improve your performances and to help you plan rehearsals, use recordings of your band and marked photocopies of the score to focus your attention and polish the sound of the band. Mark the score with high-liters as you listen to a recording of the band playing in class. As you hear something that needs work, high-lite it for working on during rehearsal.

Use a series of colors to keep track of the progress you are making. Start with a yellow high-liter, then blue then pink.

On the first listen, mark everything you hear that needs improvement with a yellow marker. During rehearsals afterwards, work to clarify any of the issues that you noticed from the first recording (that are marked in yellow).

After working on the “yellow” issues, make a new recording of the band and using the same photocopied score mark any issues that you hear with a blue high-liter. Any new issues that you hear will now be marked in blue. Any “old” issues that you tried to work on previously but did not correct will now be green (yellow and blue make green). Green problems are serious because they are not getting fixed and in fact may be becoming ingrained. You want to clear them up as soon as possible.

After working on the blue, green and reviewing any yellow issues that are needed, make a new recording of the band in rehearsal. Take out that same photocopied score

and mark all problems with a pink high-liter. New problems will now be pink, older problems will be purple or orange and seriously old problems will be brown.

As you know, there is never any perfect performance and you can drive yourself and your students crazy trying to get there. Be careful to keep it in perspective.

Dirty Swimming Pools

Cleaning up a band is like cleaning a swimming pool. You look into the pool and you see a dead horse. You get a crane and pull out the dead horse only to find a dead cow under it. You pull out the dead cow only to find a dead goat. You pull out the dead goat only to find a dead dog. You pull out the dead dog only to find a dead cat. You pull out the dead cat, O.K. you get the idea.

Eventually you get to a pool with dirty water and you vacuum it out and see leaves and dirt at the bottom. You continue to vacuum until you have a beautiful clean pool.

Bands are like that they really are. As you clean one thing you find something else that wasn't evident until you got the first thing done. As you clean, new problems seem to arise, but they were there all the time, you just couldn't hear them. As you clean and clean there will come a time when things get better. Just keep working at it.

Symphonic Band Clinic

Scheduling extra rehearsals and bringing in knowledgeable band directors that you trust to work in rehearsal with your band is a great tool. While the guest conductor works with your band, sit and listen to every rehearsal with a photocopied score and mark things the guest conductor mentions and that you hear as well. Remember, the worst place to listen to your band is on the podium. Letting someone else rehearse your band gets you off the podium and allows you to hear more objectively.

If you have two bands, you can do section rehearsals with invited clinicians, while someone else is rehearsing the other band in full band rehearsal. Flip-flop the full band and section rehearsals to get the most out of the time spent with both groups.

Symphonic Band Clinics can be scheduled in an afternoon/evening or on several days on a weekend. Much progress can be made in the rehearsal cycle with this tool. Be sure however, not to bring in a guest conductor to teach notes and rhythms; it is a waste of their time and expertise to have them teaching the nitty-gritty items. Bring in a guest conductor to help polish the final product. You may be able to combine a Symphonic Band Clinic with a Pre-Festival Concert.

Symphonic Band Clinic During School

If you are unable to schedule an after-school or weekend Band Clinic, perhaps you could do a clinic during the day as a field trip. Do the same things you would do for any Symphonic Band Clinic.

The "field trip" could also be to the performance venue, if you can get permission to

spend the day (and if it doesn't cost too much or isn't too far). A couple of important considerations are how much time is lost getting too and from the venue and what will you do for lunch. You don't want to waste valuable rehearsal time with logistics. If it is possible to work out, you would have the benefit of extra time spent on rehearsal, with a visiting clinician that you trust, in the actual venue where LGPE will be held.

Pre-Festival Concert

At least two weeks before LGPE, conduct a Pre-Festival Concert. Bring in two or three older, well-respected band directors to act as adjudicators and perform the selections you are planning to do for LGPE. Have them write comments and make recordings just as an adjudicator will for your adjudicated performance. After the event, listen to the comments, mark your scores with high-liters and get to work polishing the final product.

Get a Mentor

This one is simple. Don't be afraid to ask questions and question as many people as you can on how to improve. When I was a new teacher I constantly asked several band directors how to do things. If I heard or saw a band doing something remarkable, I would call and ask the band director how they accomplished that.

I'm a "monkey-see, monkey-do" kind of guy and I would go watch people teach so I could learn what to do. Don't be afraid that some older band director will be unwilling to discuss band stuff with you. If they are good, they love to talk about band and you are offering the ultimate compliment when you ask them for their expertise. I doubt if you will find it hard to discover an older band director that is willing to help you.

As an "older" teacher now, I have watched new teachers come into the profession with different ideas of how to improve their teaching. Some ask tons of questions on the smallest of details and some ask none. I truly respect those that ask questions more than those who don't. Be a learner, you did not learn enough in college to be an effective band director; you need a mentor.

Mentors With High-Liters

In addition to listening to your own recording and marking the score. Take your recordings to your most trusted mentor and have them listen, mark and talk to you about what they hear and how they would fix it if they were in front of the group. This step is very intimidating, yes it is, but if you want to improve it will really help you. It is one of the things you do if you are really serious about improving your teaching.

Clarity is the main issue.

This is an understatement and perhaps an oversimplification. Clarity is the main issue in preparing your band for Large Group Performance Evaluation. If the tone is clear, the intonation is clear, the articulation, the balance and blend, the dynamics, the musical shapes (interpretation) are all clear, then your performance will be great. Clarity is the main issue.

Becoming a band director has one of the longest learning curves in any industry. If you bought a computer program and it took you five to ten years to learn it, you would give up and say “forget it”. Hang in there, if you want to improve your teaching it will come with time and experience.

Large Group Performance Evaluation Checklist

- Select Music Considering the Strengths & Weaknesses of Your Group
- Order Extra Scores (Adjudicators)
- Schedule Sectional Rehearsals
- Number the measures of the adjudicator’s scores
- Schedule Pre-Festival Concert
- Record and Mark Scores with High-liters
- Work with students who have solos individually
- Sectional Rehearsal(s)
- Record and Mark Scores with High-liters
- Arrange transportation to LGPE
- Uniform arrangements
- Sectional Rehearsals(s)
- Record and Mark Scores with High-liters
- Symphonic Band Camp
- Instrument Check including Reeds and Accessories
- Pre-Festival Concert
- Listen to recordings from Pre-Festival and mark scores
- Listen to each student “pass-off” their music
- Instrument Inspection/ Reed Check
- Number the measures of the adjudicator’s scores
- Send Bribe to the Adjudicators (I’m Kidding!)