



The Ohio Music Education Association

Adjudicated Events - Best Practices

When I first arrived at The University of Akron in 1991 as coordinator of music education, one of my assigned classes was "Secondary Instrumental Methods." I had previously taught high school for 14 years with good success, but I also wanted to bring to the class other perspectives. And I was looking for someone who was very successful in schools in which you wouldn't expect musical success. Ones where few students took private lessons and/or the financial resources provided by the schools were not top tier. How could they achieve success in what many of us would call "the real world?"

I immediately thought of my high school band director from Cambridge, Max Treier. During Max's 30+ years in Cambridge the program had experienced huge swings in numbers of students in the high school caused by industries leaving town. And the community seemed to be especially effected by economic downturns. Yet, he still managed to consistently produce high quality bands.

Although I had sat through four years of his rehearsals, and had keenly followed the program during my time teaching high school, I still wanted to have him capsulize how he did it, and share that "secret" with my college instrumental music education majors. What follows is the handout he prepared for the lecture he gave the class.

Developing the maturity of the High School Concert Band by Using Meaningful Rehearsal Techniques

Max W. Treier

I. THE STUDENTS

- A. Development of the students' attitude and perspective as a band member.
 - 1. The conductor should be able to establish eye contact with students.
 - 2. Students need to be convinced that their playing is being criticized, not them.
 - 3. The students are motivated to perform well for the sake of the music and not for the conductor.
 - 4. The students are motivated to play their best during rehearsals as well as in performance.
 - 5. Rehearse the music with the concept of how it is going to sound to an audience, not to the band, or conductor.

- B. Development of the student's ensemble skills as well as their individual playing skills.
 - 1. Always be ready to play at any starting point indicated by the conductor.
 - 2. Play with confidence, even when sight-reading (It is better to hear a solid mistake than nothing).
 - 3. Listen to the bass parts to establishing the pitch center and chord tuning.
 - 4. Understand the pyramid concept of band sound (full lows, less highs).
 - 5. Watch the conductor for precision, and always listen for intonation.
 - 6. Work hard to play soft (use as much or more breath support as when playing loud).
 - 7. Percussion players must be aware of what the winds are playing.

8. Sections need to listen to what is being rehearsed by other sections.
9. Exaggerate accents, syncopations and dynamics.
10. Play articulations as marked or as instructed (have a pencil handy at all times).
11. Some quiet communication within sections is permitted if it is concerning the music.
12. Develop ability to play the music at different tempi or to play one chord at a time with the conductor.
13. Play in the proper style, and match the style being played by the section or band.
14. Dynamics are relative!

II. THE CONDUCTOR

A. Do's!

1. Always exhibit the need for efficiency in rehearsals.
2. Begin each rehearsal on time.
3. Inform students of acceptable individual warm-up procedures.
4. Choose literature that is challenging but playable by the band.
5. Inform students of rehearsal goals.
6. Inform students which pieces (or parts thereof) you plan to rehearse.
7. Use a warm-up procedure that is applicable to the pieces being rehearsed.
8. A consistent method of teaching and reviewing rhythms needs to be established.
9. Play sections of the music, and then work on the specific problems.
10. Establish a feeling of pulse during the rehearsal
11. Always listen for middle and lower parts.
12. When counting measures, inform the students of the letter or rehearsal number from which you are starting.
13. Expect the students to be ready to play immediately.
14. Know the score!

B. Don'ts

1. Don't make lengthy announcements before rehearsal.
2. Don't tune the band with a tuner for a lengthy period of time.
3. Don't learn the music with the students.
4. Don't waste valuable rehearsal time by talking with the students more than necessary.
5. Don't rehearse one piece for the entire period
6. Don't work with one section of the band for a large part of the rehearsal.
7. Don't throw a temper tantrum everyday or become angry too frequently.
8. Don't play through a section or piece without asking for some improvement.
9. Don't allow individuals or small number of students to disrupt the rehearsal.
10. Don't give permission to read a book or study for other classes during the rehearsal. Stress that everyone must be focused on the rehearsal 100% of the time.
11. Don't assume that if the melody is being played, other parts will take care of themselves.
12. Don't attempt to repair an instrument at the beginning of a rehearsal.
13. Don't discuss marching band for the entire school year!

III. THE REHEARSAL

A. The Warm-up period

1. Use both long tone and interval exercises.
2. Vary the warm-up from day to day.
3. Use other scales than Bb concert.
4. If chorales are used, avoid using an excessive amount of time.
5. Suggested warm-up materials:
 - a. Lip benders by Ray Cramer
 - b. Treasury of Scales Book
 - c. Symphonic Warm-Ups – Smith
 - d. F concert descending by half-steps (unison and chords)

- e. I, IV, V, I chord progressions in different keys
- B. Make announcements and state rehearsal goals and pieces to be rehearsed (briefly) – and maybe move this to the end of rehearsal.
- C. The first piece
- 1. Possibly a concert march.
 - 2. Be careful to avoid extreme range demands early in the rehearsal.
 - 3. Do not expect a clear pitch center immediately.
 - 4. Play through at least one strain even if there are obvious mistakes.
 - 5. Rehearse specific problems in only one or two strains.
- D. The second piece
- 1. Work on a sustained/transparent section first.
 - a. Concentrate on balance within sections and accompaniment to melody.
 - b. Check for pitch problems on unisons, octaves, fifths, and then chords.
 - c. Look for opportunities for shaping of phrases.
 - d. Work on legato style
 - 2. Work on a section that is faster in tempo, which is more rhythmic.
 - a. Strive to establish a feeling of pulse within the group.
 - b. Concentrate on rhythmic accuracy.
 - c. Work with the percussion section (observe techniques of playing percussion instruments). Is the percussion section equipment prepared for rehearsal?
 - d. Emphasize the development of ensemble precision.
 - 3. End the rehearsal by playing a full band selection of the music that is also satisfying to the students.

IV. THE SECTIONAL REHEARSAL

- A. Schedule weekly sectional rehearsals.
- 1. Strive to avoid known schedule conflicts.

2. Make attendance a requirement for membership in the group.
 3. Sectionals are imperative if there is limited private teaching available.
- B. Assisting the individual players and the section to contribute to the continuing improvement of themselves and the band.
1. Work to improve individual tone quality.
 - a. Check embouchures, mouthpiece quality and reeds
 - b. Watch for instruments that are not in proper working order.
 - c. Strive to establish correct breathing technique.
 2. Work on specific note and technique problems.
 3. Work on specific rhythmic problems.
 4. Work on specific pitch and tuning problems.
 5. Help the section in matching the desired style (length of notes).
 6. Strive to develop the concept of a "section" sound.
 7. Work to establish a helpful attitude rather than a demanding attitude.
 8. Learn the individual student's strengths and weaknesses.
 9. Change part assignments if necessary.

V. SOLOS AND ENSEMBLES

- A. Participation in this activity is another way for the teacher to work on a more individual basis with his or her students.
1. It is important to assign students to ensembles.
 2. The conductor should schedule regular rehearsals with the ensembles prior to the event.
 3. Schedule a "Solo and Ensemble" recital well before S&E and invite other directors to come in and critique the performances. Have the students critique each other using the actual S&E evaluation sheets.
 4. Record the recital and have the students critique their own performances.

5. Music selection should take place as early as possible in the fall. Don't wait until the registration deadline to form groups and have soloists select their pieces.
6. The number of students who participate in S&E is in direct proportion to the success of the full ensemble.

Max stressed that if students are not taking private lessons, it is essential that fundamentals must be taught and reinforced in full band rehearsals and sectionals. The full band rehearsal must be like a private lesson for every section of the ensemble. This requires patience by the conductor. Don't rush to teach just the notes and rhythms. By stressing fundamentals and developing a "method" for teaching basics, students will begin to be able to teach themselves.

Teachers must go into each rehearsal with a specific plan. Never just wing it! And record often, maybe daily during some stretches of preparation for a concert/performance. Play the recording back to the students. Point out their mistakes, and successes. And ask them to do the same.

Play examples of fine professional soloists and ensembles so they can understand what it is you're trying to attain. The students can't produce a characteristic sound on their instruments without a model to emulate. Students must be taught how to listen just like they need to learn what "in tune" sounds like.

Don't be afraid to make judicious cuts or edits in the music. Even professional orchestras sometimes "play one to a stand/part." If not certain about what you have in mind, don't hesitate to ask other more seasoned teachers for ideas.

Even "fun" music must be played well. What quality do you demand from your group when they play their fight song, alma mater, The Star Spangled Banner, or Happy Birthday? Sure, some performances require a higher standard. But no music deserves to be performed poorly.

Developing the overall maturity of the ensemble is not something that happens immediately. It takes time. Eventually the members of the group

will come to rehearsals with the basics under their belt. At that point you'll be able to refine the musical and overall ensemble quality. You'll then see how much further down the "musical" trail you can travel with your ensemble.

It's been over 25 years since Max first came into my classes. And I've since retired! But I firmly believe these are some great suggestions from which we can all continue to learn.

WKG

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Have an idea or plan you'd like to share in AE Best Practices? Drop me a note and we'll include it here!