

# Random Rehearsal Thoughts

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## *Organizational*

- In beginners and middle school bands, have students use binders with clear plastic sheets (may include zipper bag for band pencil, metronome, etc.).
- Have students number measures.
- If measures are not numbered, identify a spot like this:  
“Before letter B, five measures” instead of “Five measures before letter B.”  
Train students to identify measures the same way (especially good for SR Contest).

## *Scales and Key Signatures*

- Scales/Key signatures: Teach “danger note(s)”
  - 4<sup>th</sup> scale degree in the key of Eb concert, and onward around the flat side of the circle of fifths. (Concert Ab, Db, Gb, Cb)
  - 7<sup>th</sup> scale degree in the key of Bb concert, and onward around the sharp side of the circle of fifths. (Concert F, C, G, D, A, E, B)

## *Meter/Rhythm*

- Counting/clapping.
  - Use some type of syllabic system to help students gain rhythmic independence.
  - Count syllables and clap.
  - Count and do fingerings/positions.
  - Letter names and fingerings (best with instruments of same key).
- Metronome usage:
  - First thing: if you use it all the time, turn it off! If you never use it, turn it on!
  - If the band gets off the metronome sound (rushing or dragging) STOP immediately! Every beat you let them play “off” the metronome sound damages the positive work done by using the metronome.
  - In slower pulses, usually need a subdivision click added.
  - In rapid pulse, don't use subdivision.

- In young band (MS advanced band) playing at  $\text{♩} = 100$  or faster, have students finger/air band/sizzle with metronome before playing the passage.
- If playing a piece with constant percussion on it, be sure that percussionist can see the light on the metronome. Also can have percussionists in young band tap rhythms on leg/carpet/rim if metronome is on, so as not to throw winds off. (Probably shouldn't use metronome if you are at a point that the percussion are playing pretty full sounds.)
- Tempo problems can be predicted
  - Slurred/legato music often drags.
  - Low register drags on many instruments.
  - Repeated figures (especially duple subdivisions and shorter values) rush.
  - Loud music often rushes (unless the sound gets so "fat" that it slows down).
- Entrances after rests tend to be behind the pulse, especially if the tempo is bright and the piece is rhythmic (not so much in slow/legato music).

### *Intonation*

- Tuning machine (tuner or strobe)
  - First thing: if you use it all the time, turn it off! If you never use it, turn it on!
  - All tuners use Equal Temperament for the 12 chromatic notes comprising the octave. This means the tuners are useless for those playing the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of a major or minor chord, using Just Intonation to get the chord to "ring."
  - Tuners are not PERFECT—they can be out of calibration with each other.
  - There is a setting on most tuners allowing you to set it at A=440. (If this setting gets moved...ouch!)
  - Tuners are extremely valuable for learning intonation idiosyncrasies, but it does not tune chords for you! Ears have to do that.
  - In tuning the band, "Down the row, flutes, one at a time...", always check more than one pitch.
  - Strobes and digital tuners are valuable tools, but the best tuning is done by ear.
  - Intonation has to come from the bottom because the lower sounds have overtones in them that have to be matched by higher sounds.
  - 5<sup>th</sup> partials are flat compared to Equal Temperament (more noticeable on brass because woodwinds almost never play in partials that high).
  - 6<sup>th</sup> partials are sharp compared to Equal Temperament.

*THE BEST TUNING METHOD IS MATCHING AN ELECTRONIC DRONE OR SOUND. This is, after all, what we all have to do when playing a concert: we have to match the sounds we are hearing from other sources (other players).*

- Another great tuning concept: using pairs of players. Make the waves go away.

## *General Rehearsal Techniques*

- Have students touch elements (kinesthetic, helps visual learners too)
  - Key signatures and danger notes (especially after key changes).
  - Accidentals (reoccurrences within measure, bar line cancellation).
  - Repeats (touch where you go back to).
  - D.C. (touch where you go back to).
  - D.S. (touch where you go back to).
  - Coda jump.
  
- Fog/sizzle/air band/singing parts
  - These are all ways to “practice” a passage without making any sounds. Do any of these with fingerings/positions in rhythm.
  
  - Fog is blowing soft air, not enough to produce sound. Can still be articulated.
  - Sizzle is just what it says—insist on intense air stream in sizzle to relate to the sound made on the instrument.
  - Air band is “fog” to some people; to others air band means singing your part (on pitch!).
  - Singing parts—should be done on pitch as close as possible!
  
- Long tones/slow scales/expanding interval studies
  - Build in breaths or you have ragged breathing or notes dying out.
  - Teach staggered breathing as a technique, but better if NOT taught on “warm-ups” like these. (Because long tone studies have a very specific purpose.)
  
- Articulation
  - Professionals are capable of starting notes with several types of articulation. You are NOT teaching professionals in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Therefore...
  - Teach all articulations with the same front to the note. Accents are made with increased energy, no difference in the tongue.
  - Good high school players may be able to being modifying starts to notes. It’s all dependent on the sound coming out of the instrument.
  - Articulation is usually related to style.
  - Style up to highest sounds.
  - Every instrument (except clarinet) has more trouble articulating low range.
  
- Trills
  - All trills go UP.
  - All trills go up to the next note in the key, unless there is a chromatic alteration marked above the trill. That alteration affects the upper note.
  - Trills usually take more air to sound very good. If a section is too loud, use less players playing good trills rather than using all players playing insufficient air.

- Balance

- Generally speaking, use the pyramid concept: more low sounds, less high
- In balancing color, match the woodwinds to the brass, percussion are color

- Blend

- I don't agree with the popular concept of "blend," especially when people say "hide your sound inside some else's." First off, I don't want a saxophone to sound like a horn, and I don't want a bassoon to sound like a euphonium. The beauty of an orchestra, and by extension, the band, is that each instrument has a distinct sound. I believe what most people say when they talk about "blend" is matching tonal color. In that case, you almost always have to match woodwind to brass. In rare cases where a composer writes so well that a "combined color" can be achieved, it is achieved not by "hiding" a sound, but rather by matching and combining (good example, Mahler's Symphony No. 3, 6<sup>th</sup> mvt., rehearsal mark 11, where one flute, one oboe and one clarinet combine to make an ethereal, unearthly color.)

- Things to "bring out"

- Melody
- Counter melody
- Solos/important lines
- Chromatic passages

- Special release

- If the piece ends in a tranquil manner (especially on a long note), you may use the technique of "low leaves last." In this technique, higher sounds leave the sound immediately, and lowest sounds leave a micro-beat late. If you do it correctly, it can help the tone "ring" after the release!