

## Music Rehearsal Concepts: Rehearsing a Phrase to Excellence!

### 1. REQUIRED SKILLS

- Players should be able to create a QUALITY and CHARACTERISTIC SOUND as an individual and as part of the ensemble. The development of INDIVIDUAL and FULL ENSEMBLE TONE should be an ongoing process that is touched on in each rehearsal or practice session. (ex. 1-1) (ex. 1-4)
- Players should be able to match their sound with like instruments to create a sense of BLEND. Ensemble members should think of putting their sound inside the sound of the person next to them. Performing with players who do not understand the importance of BLEND is often the weakest link in many bands around the globe. (ex. 1-1)
- Players should demonstrate the ability to consistently play their instrument in IN TUNE both horizontally and vertically. Many students become adept at tuning to those in their trio (HORIZONTAL TUNING) but are often inconsistent when it comes to listening back (or down) to the chord tones that support their respective part (VERTICAL TUNING). Students must understand and demonstrate an understanding of JUST INTONATION, especially when tuning major and minor triads. Players should also have a sense of tuning tendencies on instruments other than their own in order to make appropriate adjustments when playing with non-like instruments (flute player trying to play in tune with a trumpet player). (ex. 3-1)
- Players should be able to determine their individual or section role in any given phrase in order to create appropriate BALANCE. Students must go beyond the “I have the melody or I don’t” mentality in order to explore the subtle differences between a counter melody and an accompaniment, or between two different types of accompaniment within the same phrase. Directors must have a working plan to help students determine their role within the HIERARCHY OF PARTS. TRANSPARENCY within a given phrase is only achievable if the hierarchy of parts is in place and if all individuals and sections play at the appropriate VOLUME. (ex. 1-1) (Tuning chorale #1)
- Players should demonstrate the ability to play IN TIME while adjusting to the appropriate level of SUB-DIVISION within a given tempo. Students must understand that every individual in the ensemble is responsible for internalizing the pulse and for interpreting rhythms within the TIME GRID, which is a combination of the pulse and the necessary level of sub-division needed to interpret all rhythms within a given phrase. (ex. 2-1)
- Players must demonstrate the ability to use the appropriate ARTICULATION on any note or combination of notes within a given phrase based on the composer’s markings and/or based on an understanding of the STYLE in which the piece is to be played. The approach to articulation must match among players performing the same set of notes and rhythms. Players must understand when an articulation actually calls for a change of tone or volume and most importantly, when they do not. Performers using too heavy of a tongue when articulating is often a problem within school age groups. (ex. 2-1)
- Players must be able to demonstrate MUSICIANSHIP by displaying appropriate nuance and/or shape within a given phrase. Determining PHRASING is a skill that often takes time to develop in individual performers. Therefore, the director is often charged with helping

students to develop musical and logical phrasing. Inherent within the ability to play a phrase that is musical and pleasing to the ear, players must be able to move from one note to another (FLOW) without any extraneous noise or distractions. Many bands will play musical and pleasing phrases that come off less than desired because of the lack of flow from one note to the next. (ex. 6-4)

- Players must demonstrate the ability to READ MUSIC. This skill is not mentioned here in jest, as music reading in many areas of the country has taken a back seat to rote teaching and/or working only 3-4 pieces in the fall (marching band) and 3 pieces in the spring (concert band festival). Similar to tone quality, music literacy should be an ongoing developmental process for individual players and for ensembles. Time not spent on teaching students to read will in turn add more time than is necessary when preparing a new band work. Students who can read music will tend to practice more outside of band rehearsal than those who have less reading ability. (rhythm of the day + scales)

## 2. DEVELOPING THE PHRASE

- ISOLATING SKILLS within a given musical phrase will involve a kind of MICRO to MACRO approach in rehearsal. This type of rehearsal technique is most realistic during a sectional but should still be an important part of the full group rehearsal.

One example might be taking a tutti rhythm within a large group (all melody, all countermelody, all who have the same accompaniment part, etc.) and then isolating skills with those players only. If you isolate only 1 skill with this group of players, the rest of the ensemble will not have to wait long and more importantly, ensemble members not playing should stay engaged by listening to and learning about that part of the phrase being rehearsed.

- ISOLATING NOTES allows the players to listen to (and check) each note in a phrase without rhythm constraints. Instead of playing the rhythms as written, have the students play every note as a whole note, half note or quarter note, depending on the rhythmic and/or fingering difficulty level of the phrase. Many prefer the longer note values so that students have more time to fix wrong notes while also correcting other issues like tuning and blend.
- ISOLATING NOTES WITH A DRONE is the same as isolating notes but uses a drone to sustain a pitch while students are playing. The drone can come from a tuning app, a keyboard that sustains pitches, or from the students themselves as long as it can be clearly heard by the individuals or sections that are checking notes. For example, if the tonal center of the phrase is based around Eb, the drone can sound the Eb and students can make sure their pitches stay within the tuning realm of that tonal center. This exercise is great for helping students develop the skill of vertical tuning, as one of their charges is to relate every note played to the tonic of the key, which in this case is Eb.
- ISOLATING RHYTHM allows the students to work on playing correct rhythms without having to change notes, but also allows them to work on matching articulations and playing correct style. This exercise is easy for students to understand and can lead to quick improvement if done correctly. The director or student leader chooses an appropriate pitch (middle of the range or slightly lower) and the players perform the rhythms on that pitch. Tempo can be adjusted depending on the difficulty level of the phrase. As previously mentioned, this exercise is extremely valuable because it helps to make sure each student is playing the correct rhythms, playing them within the given

pulse and/or sub-division, as well as matching articulation and style. Any challenging rhythmic passage can be played on an F Concert, Bb Concert or Eb Concert with positive results. This exercise should be done with an amplified metronome for consistency and for the best possible outcome. The metronome can also sound an appropriate level of sub-division for students to use as a CHECK PATTERN for rhythmic accuracy and timing.

- ISOLATING AWARENESS through SINGING is an important step in rehearsing a phrase to excellence. The only way we know if the student actually HEARS THE PHRASE IN THEIR HEAD is if they can vocalize the notes, rhythms, articulations and phrasing. The instrumentalist who HEARS the phrase before they play will almost always perform accurately and musically. Another step in this process is having brass players interpret the phrase on their MOUTHPIECE. If they can accurately perform the phrase on the mouthpiece, chances are very high that they will have a performance free of distractions, such as cracked pitches, wrong partials, etc.

### 3. FINAL THOUGHTS

- Everything discussed above should include your PERCUSSION section.
- Use an amplified metronome with all exercises and music until students can keep appropriate time on their own.
- TIME is now and will always be our most valuable commodity. Only YOU, as the director of YOUR band program, know how much time you can realistically spend on the exercises suggested above. But consider this, any TIME SPENT developing and isolating the skills of your individual players and your ensemble will surely result in TIME SAVED as your group prepares for performances. Seeing these exercises through to their potential outcomes can have a profound impact on how your group is perceived by musicians and non-musicians alike. Take a few more minutes in each rehearsal to use these exercises and to make sure you don't SKIP STEPS when it comes to developing your ensembles.