

## ARRANGING TIPS

### Getting Out the Gray

by Vince Corozine (ASCAP)

**M**uch of the music we hear and play is over-orchestrated. The result of this superabundance of musical sounds is a neutral, bland, lifeless gray without contrast, tonal variety, or clarity of line. How can a conductor or arranger help his group achieve a clean and varied sound, deal with obvious intonation problems and still maintain a balanced ensemble? I have found the following ideas to be quite successful with school instrumental groups.

#### Reductions

1. Reduce the number of players on the high flute/clarinet parts to improve intonation (flutes and clarinets tend to overblow in their high register). Ask the clarinets and flutes to play softer as they progress upward, and/or reduce the number of players to two per part in soft passages. Take the time to determine which players play in tune with one another. You will be that much closer to achieving good intonation and proper blend. Faulty embouchures and a variety of instrumental brands are factors not quickly or easily overcome.
2. Do not have the saxophones double the brass parts when a pure brass sound is desired. The sound of the saxophones tends to dull or soften the edge and brilliance of the brass. For the same reason do not double the bass or contrabass clarinet with the tuba in purely brass passages.
3. Do not let the saxes play horn cues unless the horns cannot handle their parts. The thick, oily sound of the saxes tends to thicken the horn line and often creates intonation problems.
4. Use only one oboe or bassoon on unison lines to eliminate differences in intonation among young players. Or, try writing an accompanying line that moves in thirds with the melody. Use only one saxophone player on high unison lines, since student saxophonists have difficulty playing in tune in this range.
5. Put only one or two trumpets (cornets) on very high and loud passages. You will maintain your players' endurance and soften obvious intonation problems.
6. Use bells only for special effects and do not allow them to play oboe or flute lines. The ear quickly tires of certain sounds when they are used for long periods. Bells, percussion, piccolo, woodwind trills, and full-sounding Asafe@ tutti sections become especially tiresome.
7. Eliminate the bass clarinets from fast-moving bass lines. The instrument thickens the line, makes it sluggish, and causes the music to drag.

8. Tubas usually play too often. Look for spots where they can be omitted. The tuba has a tendency to blot out some upper woodwind parts and the resulting sound is less brilliant, especially in softer passages. If the tubas are not carefully tuned and are allowed to play sharp, the entire band sounds flat.

*Be sure that a reinforcing line at the octave is not heavier in weight and intensity than the fundamental tone.*

## Additions

1. Add one triangle note (a small triangle and thin striker) to fermatas in slow-moving pieces, or to climax points. It provides a lift and a sparkle to the sound, and brightens up the section. Triangle rolls (inside the closed corner of the triangle) are effective when combined with woodwind trills.

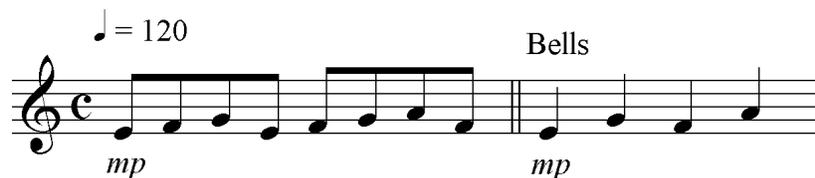
2. For added brilliance, double (an octave higher) a trumpet line with a piccolo, flute or bells. Be sure that the reinforcing line at the octave is not heavier in weight and intensity than the fundamental tone. Remember that bells tend to take the edge off staccato passages.

3. Add the deep sonority of the contrabass or contra-alto clarinet to works published before 1950 by doubling the tuba or string bass line. This will add firmness, volume, and resonance to the music. The contrabass clarinet can be substituted for the tuba in soft passages. (The second section of Vaughan Williams' Folk Song Suite is a beautiful example of creative writing for the contrabass clarinet.)

## Modifications

1. Rescore fast legato trombone passages for a baritone horn or tenor sax. These passages are particularly difficult for student players.

2. Bells played at a rapid rate tend to sound messy and blurred. The following example shows how one might modify a typical bell part to outline a musical idea.



3. Horns tend to respond slightly later than either trumpets or trombones, especially when all

have the same rhythmic figures. To achieve a crisper, cleaner response modify the horn part as follows:

♩ = 84 F. Horns 1-2 *staccato*  
*f*  
 F. Horns 3-4  
*f*

4. Low, harsh-sounding oboe parts (with low D, C, B, Bb) can be given to a clarinet (if the line is legato) or to trumpet with a straight mute (if the line is staccato).
5. Rapid staccato passages around the Abreak@ of the clarinet can be given to the trumpets.
6. Generally, mark sustaining parts one dynamic level lower than staccato parts. Legato lines have more carrying power.
7. To avoid fatigue, rewrite the horns so they can alternate when similar passages repeat.
8. Simplify quick-moving rhythms in low ranges for the larger instruments. Note how the following unison lower brass passage has been simplified for the tuba.

♩ = 112  
*f*

9. Rearrange works to feature solo and small ensemble playing within the large group. Prominent parts help build both tone and the student=s confidence as the players are forced out of the Aprotective custody@ of the larger ensemble.

Listening to numerous big, thick chords and full harmonic progressions is a tiring experience. The impact of rich, full-sounding chords tends to obliterate clarity of design and

movement while pointing out the need for music that is sufficiently transparent to allow different sections, lines, and tonal colors to be heard. Perhaps the above suggestions will help your groups achieve a clearer, cleaner sound. Isn't it worth the time and effort to get rid of the gray?