

TEN CHARACTERISTICS of a SUCCESSFUL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAM

by Vince Corozine

What ingredients fo into the development of a high quality, effective, effective instrumental music program? No doubt, an adequate music budget and constant availability of the students are powerful ingredients. However, let us look at some ingredients that do not require a huge budget, but are part of a unique approach to promoting your instrumental program.

Most successful music programs do not appear by chance, but are the result of careful plannig, teaching experience, and professional expertise.

Here are a few attributes of a successful instrumental music program that require little of no increase in funding:

1. LOW DROP OUT RATE

Students should view the music program with enthusiasm and exhibit a genuine desire to learn. This means that they will remain in the program throughout their school years. An enthusiastic teacher who can motivate the students to want to learn more will have a positive impact on their lives.

While earning certificates, plaques, and other physical awards may have a short-term positive effect, I have found that musical rewards are the most enduring rewards. I.e.: Producing a high quality band, orchestra, or jazz ensemble will provide a satisfying and lasting musical experience for the students.

2. USE OF GOOD QUALITY MUSIC

The selection of high quality music that fits the technical and emotional level of the ensemble will do wonders in raising and maintaining the morale within the ensemble. It will take a good deal of research, on part of the music teacher, to select music that is interesting, challenging, and aesthetically pleasing to the students. One should view with suspicion transcriptions of orchestral pieces created for bands. In most cases, the use of the Bb clarinets in the band to replace the violins in the orchestra rally does not work. I also seriously question the effectiveness of music where the ensemble plays throughout the entire piece. This constant playing of all instruments gives the students the impression that full-sounding, *tutti* playing is the normal way that a band or orchestra should sound. I agree that young bands and orchestras need the security of playing a part surrounded by others who are playing the same part, but eventually we should introduce students to music where various instrument colors are heard in isolation, or new combinations of instruments emerge. “The protective custody of the ensemble” can rob your students of ear development (they may never hear what a bass clarinet, viola, or bassoon sound like), and will give them a false indication of what great band or orchestra music should sound like.

Admittedly, musically transparent scores are more for the students to master regarding intonation, blend, and balance...but the extra effort expended is worth it if we are to provide our students a true idea of what a band or orchestra should sound like.

Each student should have a solo book, duet book, and etude book for private practice, and they should be encouraged to memorize a solo of his/her choice every marking period. This will aid in the student to develop confidence and will aid in the development of his/her ear.

3. FREQUENT PERFORMANCES

Performing frequently increases the visibility of the instrumental ensemble in the eyes of the faculty, administration, and community. Performing at concerts, assembly programs, community functions, parades; the use of small ensembles at art shows, along with recording the band or orchestra on a CD for airplay over the local Radio or TV Stations prior to a concert or special performance can enhance a music program. The administration wants to know that the students are acquiring positive experiences for the budget allotted to the music department, and the community wants to see that their tax money is used to develop superior musical groups. There is not doubt that frequent performances will enhance the visibility of any music program. .

4. TEACH ALL PHASES OF MUSIC

- a. **Theory:** Basic concepts of music theory can be taught during each rehearsal. It is best to pull the musical concepts from actual music and not teach them in isolation (unrelated from actual music)... I.e.: "How far apart (one half and whole steps) are these two notes? Notice how the composer uses chromatic (half steps) chords to reach the modulation (change of scenery). Observe how this modulation rises up a major third (two whole steps) and gives a lift to the next section. Listen to how the next chord sounds in relation to the previous one. What note of the chord changed when we went from a major chord to a minor chord? What note or notes could we add to this chord to make is sound fuller?" An effective teaching method is to ask many questions and let the students make educated guesses.

- b. **History of Music:** Directors can select music from different music periods for the band or orchestra to play. In the concert band, "Prelude and Fugue in G minor" by J.S. Bach/Mohlman can be used to teach the style of a fugue. Again, the teacher can ask. "How far apart are the entrances? Are the second and third entrances spaced evenly apart or does the third entrance enter at a later time?" Students should be able to recognize by ear, the differences between music of the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary periods. In addition, they will only be able to do this as we expose them music of a high quality. The student should also be able to identify the differences in musical phrasing for each musical

period. For example, “Describe how this selection by Mozart is played differently than the selection by Hindemith?”

- c. **Student Conductors:** Each student should have a pencil and a conducting baton in his/her folder. The Director can give a short conducting lesson at the end of each rehearsal. This will aid in student understanding of what the Director does.
- d. **Marches and How They Differ:** I.e.: English marches are usually performed in a slow and dignified style, while Sousa and Fillmore marches have more pizzazz. Show them how J.P. Sousa slowed his marches during the final strain to create more tension in the music.
- e. **Contrasting Arrangements of the Same Piece:** Rehearsing two versions of the same piece of music will show the students how different composers approach the arranging of a piece of music. It would be well to examine different textures, styles, harmonies, form, pedal-points, extensions of phrases, climax points, and other compositional devices used by the arrangers.
- f. **Develop a Musical Vocabulary:** Professionals use musical terms (mostly in Italian) when referring to music. I.e.: Form, counterpoint, style, recapitulation, fermata, motive, theme, phrase, articulation and so on. It is wise not to teach music terms that the student will have to unlearn at a later date. I.e.: A *fermata* is NOT a “Bird’s eye!” It is a *fermata*. Attempt to use musical terms only...students can learn them as quickly as they can the shortcuts.
- g. **Listen to Recordings of Fine Band Literature:** There are many fine recordings of orchestra and band literature available on CDs. These can be used to evaluate styles and musical interpretations.
- h. **Attend Live Concerts:** Attending live concerts (for pleasure or for extra grade credit) will enhance and expand the musical development of our students. Students should be encouraged to participate in solo and ensemble contests at their appropriate performance level, participate in All-State band, orchestras, and jazz bands, and perform in pit orchestras for musical productions. Involvement in diversified musical experiences will expand the cultural horizons of our students.
- i. **Teach General Concepts:** There are certain things that happen while performing that our students should be made aware of. I.e.; “Brass and flutes go sharp and woodwinds go flat in a crescendo. The rise in air temperature makes the instruments go sharper, especially the larger brass instruments, and must be retuned.” “It takes at least ten minutes to get an

instrument warmed up before it can be properly tuned. Human beings have a tendency to rush unison passages, so we should make sure that we hold back on all unison passages. If the tuba is tuned sharp, the band will sound flat!

5. NOTE READING IS TAUGHT AS A SKILL

This area should not be left to chance. Student must be trained to “scan” phrases and to read groupings of notes. Reading individual notes should be discouraged...it is too slow a process and will bog down the student in his/her sight reading. The use of flash cards containing groups of notes is helpful for quick identification and memory of musical phrases. We should use terms such as “scale line” or “chord line” in referring to music passages. We must help our students turn notes into “patterns of sound.”

6. PLAN FOR A BALANCE IN INSTRUMENTATION

One of the most perplexing problems facing band and orchestra directors is: “How do I achieve a balance within my ensemble?” Most ensembles are deficient in the lower-sounding instruments such as Tuba, Cello, String Basses, Trombone, Bassoon, Bass Clarinet, or French Horns. Without these instruments an ensemble can sound top heavy (too many treble clef instruments) and lack the resonance needed to perform music of a high quality. Any musical ensemble that lacks these instruments is robbing their students of the opportunity to hear what characteristic band and orchestral music should sound like.

A methodical approach to achieving balanced instrumentation is suggested for grades four through eight:

Legend: The (+) means that a certain number of players have been added on that particular instrument during that year. The arrows indicate that players have been switched to other instruments during that year. (I have found that switching friends to the same instrument often proves to work.)

The result is a fairly balanced instrumentation of 38 players in grades seven and eight.

Grade	4	5	6	7	8
Flute		2	3 (+1)	4	4
Oboe				2	2
Clarinet	6 (+4)	8	9 (+3)	9	9
Alto Clarinet			1	1	1
Bass Clarinet				1	1
Bassoon				1	1
Totals	6	10	13	18	18
Trumpet	6 (+2)	6 (+3)	9 (+3)	9	6
Trombone	3 (+1)	4	4 (+2)	4	4
Baritone Horn				2	2
F. Horn		2	2	3	4
Tuba				2	2
Totals	9	12	15	20	20

7. TEACH PITCH DISCRIMINATION

- a. **Encourage Careful Listening:** We must foster careful listening and not tell our students if they are playing sharp or flat. We must insist that they listen to one other and let them judge the results for themselves. We might ask: “Do the two of you sound the same? If not, adjust the length of the horns so that you will sound the same.” Encourage them to listen to the “beats” (vibrations) between the two sounds. I.e.; One student holds a note while the other drifts upward (sharp) and then back to the note (on pitch) and then drifts downward (flat) and back to the note (on pitch). This illustrates how a tone should be properly tuned, focused, and

centered.

- b. **Spatial Concepts:** Playing in tune is 50% ear and 50% mechanical. It takes approximately one-third of a second for a sound to register in one's brain as being either sharp or flat. In very fast tempos, many notes can rush by in one third of a second. I.e.; Trombonists and string players must be able to accurately hit each position in fast-moving passages for it is nearly impossible to correct the notes while playing at a rapid speed. The student must "know" (by feel or touch) exactly where each note is to be played .
- c. **The Electronic Tuner:** This is a practical instrument to use to accurately measure the length of one's instrument. It is not however, a guarantee that one will play in tune. Only trained, careful listening will do this

8. PROPER CARE AND HANDLING OF INSTRUMENTS

Students should be expected to maintain their instrument and keep it functioning properly. This means demonstrating to the woodwind students how to swab their instrument after playing, to the string student how to clean resin from stringed instruments and to loosen the bow, and to brass students how to wash brass mouthpieces and lubricate brass tuning slides to prevent sticking.

9. SUMMER MUSIC PROGRAM

A student can progress very rapidly during a concentrated five day per week program for six weeks. In some cases he/she can progress at a rate which is equivalent to a full year's playing of instruction. The summer music program propel one's total program and it is an excellent time to start beginners, or for students to experiment with playing a secondary instrument. The relaxed atmospheres, where grades are not emphasized, provide the perfect atmosphere for advanced learning.

10. WILLINGNESS TO SHARE STUDENTS WITH OTHER TEACHERS

Exposing our students to a variety of musical experiences should be a regular feature of the music program. Perhaps your school is not able to provide musical experiences such as performing in a pit band for musicals, or your band or orchestra is very small in number, or you don't have the time to begin a jazz band. If any of these are the case, I would suggest that you encourage your students to join with students from other schools so they will be able to experience varied musical opportunities. Some of these opportunities might be involving your students in exchange concerts with other schools, combining the two ensembles together to achieve a fuller sound, auditioning for all state band or orchestra, joining a community orchestra, band, or jazz band. The more exposure a student has with all kinds of music, the more well rounded he/she will be as a musician.

We must, through our own positive attitude towards music and enthusiasm for life, contribute to the development of the students' self-concept and musical development.