

SURVIVAL KIT FOR YOUNG TEACHERS

'Ways to Improve Music Preparation'

Mike Croom

TIPS:

1. Schedule rehearsal plans using a calendar; decide when and how to correct problems; assign minutes to each rehearsal spot; monitor and adjust
2. Listen to players individually or by parts (ex. Clar 2) in sectionals or pull outs during rehearsals (team teachers)
3. Play parts with students by transposition to improve pitch and style
4. Leave a rehearsal spot only after improvement is noticed by students
5. Rehearse slowly; repeat spots as needed; prepare entire program to the same level
6. Use the rehearsal to put 'learned parts' together; focus on pitch, balance, precision
7. Tell students what the rehearsal objective is; students must be attentive
8. Let the students play a lot during rehearsal; stop when necessary – make brief comments

CONCERT CONTEST ADJUDICATION SHEET

TONE

- Reinforce embouchure and air support
- Use standard instrument brands
- Use quality mouthpieces (Keep some to try)
- Use quality reeds in med/med-hard strengths
- Use professionally adjusted double reeds
- Use well adjusted instruments
- Stress good tone production in all playing situations
- Stop and comment if students are careless with tone

INTONATION

- Keep a few varying length clarinet barrels
- Do a tuning survey with every student – pull valve slides
- After survey, take instruments to the shop
- Use the strobe to set an A-440 reference pitch, then cross tune by ear
- Use stable notes for initial cross tuning process
- Match unlike instruments to one instrument with stable pitch (clar) in tetrachords
- Establish a tuning group; Major triad and octave; match individuals to group
- Match unisons and octaves in the music – sing parts
- Adjust 3rds and 7ths of troublesome chords using alternate fingerings
- Mention pitch often; make it a priority
- Know alternate fingerings and their pitch tendencies
- Rewrite chords, reduce excess players on the third of triads
- Soloists must enter at established pitch level for the group
- Listen to chords vertically; sustain notes to identify problems
- Use equipment with compensating mechanisms where possible
- Tune the notes in the music, not just the warm up chorale

BALANCE

- Keep sounds within a set frame of volume
- Adjust volume of chord parts by ear to sound right
- Sustain chords and identify chord members
- All chord members must be sounding; substitute instruments if needed
- Limit the number and volume of saxophones
- First part notes usually project due to range
- Add players to inner and lower parts
- Melody should always be heard easily
- Adjust written dynamics of accompaniment parts
- Players listen across and down; learn to stay inside of other sounds
- If one player can always be heard, he is out of tune, out of balance, or both
- Cornets blend more easily than trumpets in the ensemble
- Give careful thought to horn angles, bell position, and set ups
- Experiment with stand height, tray position and volumes
- Refer to the McBeth Pyramid Balance concept as a guide
- Stand back from the band and listen

TECHNIQUE

- Students mark parts in pencil
- Directors can pre-mark parts to save time
- Practice running 16ths with snare sub-division of beat
- Improve unsteady tempo with snare divided beat
- Avoid over articulation and excessive percussion strike sound
- For fast tonguing, use tip of tongue, legato syllable, softer dynamic
- Coordinate tongue and fingers using least motion
- Clean 16ths by varying the rhythm in set patterns; isolate 2-3 worst notes
- Correct misprints early – director should mark these corrections
- Edit parts; assign substitute parts where needed
- Increase rehearsal time for more difficult parts

INTERPRETATION

- Highlight dynamics to achieve 5 volume levels\
- Set appropriate tempos
- Consult multiple recordings; listen to concerts
- Consult orchestral recordings of transcriptions
- Use the Pre-Contest Concert as an opportunity for a second opinion
- Bring another director in to a rehearsal to listen
- Make transcriptions and standard band pieces sound authentic
- The march, original band piece, and transcription should sound individual in style
- Reinforce student understanding with appropriate conducting gestures
- The director should assign meanings to conducting gestures
- Avoid over-conducting – let the band sound make the musical statement
- Director and students must establish eye contact
- Director should convey energy and a sense of urgency to students

GENERAL EFFECT

- Work for smooth, tapered phrases; save air for phrase endings
- Assign places to breathe; mark them in the music
- Emphasize volume changes; sustain first notes of changes to establish level
- Observe different types of accents, staccato, legato and slur markings
- Select a varied program that brings out strengths of the group
- Soloists should be able to perform well under pressure
- Band should be conditioned to recover well from mistakes
- Students should play with confidence and musicality

STAGE DEPARTMENT

- Professional type presentation is evident
- Set up of equipment is handled efficiently
- No excess movement or talking by students
- Wear the uniform properly
- Students usually behave if they are well prepared
- Students should be polite while others perform
- The concert hall should not be entered during a performance

SIGHT READING CONTEST ADJUDICATION SHEET

PREPARATION

(Sight read in rehearsals)

Contest Study Period:

- Point out key and time signatures, style, entrances, unusual starts and stops
- Identify who has melody and accompaniment in various sections
- Vocalize rhythmic parts and tempo changes
- Air and fingers through it; air stick percussion parts
- Assign percussion parts and soloists
- Spend most time with sections that need it

PERFORMANCE

- Most important: Observe key and time signature, good rhythmic understanding, good fundamental tone and intonation, major dynamic changes

INTERPRETATION AND STYLE

- The general musical idea must come through for each section in the piece:
- Heavy or light; lyrical or rhythmic, etc.

ERROR RECOVERY

- Students should notice and recover from notation and rhythmic mistakes

End Of Study Time Warning

- Review major key, tempo, and time changes briefly
- Ask for student questions before starting